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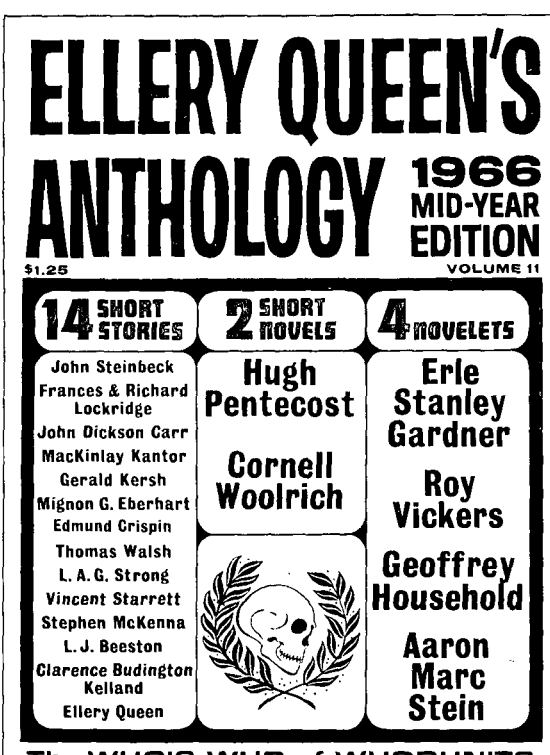

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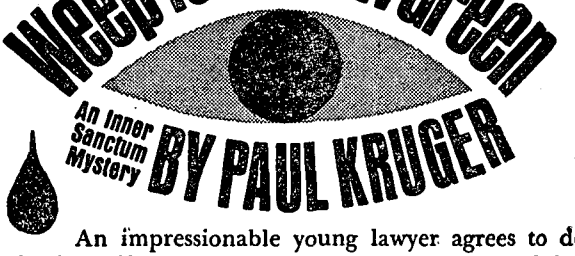

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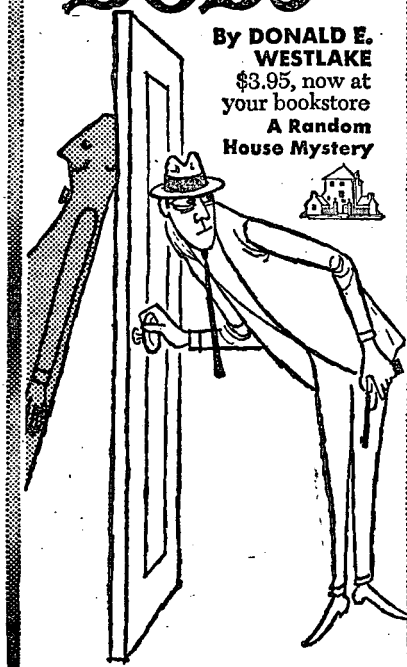

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first *NEW SHORT NOVEL* in 4 years by

ELLERY QUEEN

It began with a double celebration—the birth of the New Year and the 70th birthday of Godfrey Mumford, famous throughout the horticultural world as a breeder of chrysanthemums. But happy as the double occasion was, there were ominous, deeply disturbing overtones.

If only the others had known, they might have been forewarned . . . For Ellery had come back to Wrightsville—one of his spur-of-the-moment visits to the town he loved so much, to the New England town where he had experienced some of his greatest triumphs—and greatest failures; and it was no secret (especially to Chief of Police Newby) that Ellery Queen was Wrightsville's perennial jinx. Whenever Ellery came to Wrightsville, evil came out of its lair . . .

The Chrysanthemum Case proved no exception. Indeed, it proved to be one of the most perplexing mysteries in Ellery's career—a crime whose investigation made the "great detective" think he was Ellery in Blunderland; and to add the ultimate grotesquerie, the case offered the "last word" in bizarre and fantastic clues, the "last word" in baffling and frustrating "dying messages."

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MUM IS THE WORD

by ELLERY QUEEN

December 31, 1964 THE BIRTHday of the new year and the old man became a fact at midnight. The double anniversary was celebrated in the high-ceilinged drawing room of Godfrey Mumford's house in Wrightsville with certain overtones not in the tradition. Indeed, in accepting the offerings of his family and his friend, old Godfrey would have been well advised to recall the warning against gift-bearing Greeks (although there had never been a Greek in Wrightsville, at least none of Godfrey's acquaintance; the nearest to one had been Andy Birobatyan, the florist who was of Armenian descent; Andy had shared the celebrated Mumford green thumb until the usual act of God had severed it).

The first Greek to come forward

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with her gift was Ellen Mumford Nash. Having gone through three American husbands, Godfrey's daughter had just returned from England, where she was in the fifth year of a record run with number four, an Egyptologist connected with the British Museum—the prodigal daughter home for a visit, her nostrils flaring as if she smelled something unpleasant.

Nevertheless, Ellen said sweetly to her father, "Much happiness, darling. I do hope you find these useful."

As it developed, the hope was extravagant. Her gift to him was a gold-plated cigarette case and lighter. Godfrey Mumford had given up smoking in 1952.

Christopher's turn came next. A little less than 30 years before, Christopher had followed Ellen into the world by a little less than 30 minutes. (Their father had never allowed himself to be embittered by the fact that their birth had killed their mother, although he had had occasional reason to reflect on the poor exchange.)

Ellen, observing her twin over the champagne they were all sharing, was amused by his performance. How well he did the loving-son bit! With such talent it seemed remarkable that dear Chris had never risen above summer stock and walk-ons off Broadway. The reason, of course, was that he had never worked very hard at his chosen profession; but then he had never worked very hard at anything.

"A real swinger of a birthday, father," Christopher was saying with passionate fondness. "And a hundred more to come."

"I'll settle for one at a time, son. Thanks very much." Godfrey's hair was gray but still vigorous; his big body tended toward gauntness now, but after 70 years he carried himself straight as a dancer. He was examining a silver-handled walking stick. "It's really handsome."

Christopher sidled stage right, smiling sincerely; and Godfrey set the stick aside and turned to the middle-aged woman standing by. She was small, on the dumpling side; the hands holding the gift had the stub nails and rough skin of habitual housework. Her face under the snowy hair lay quiet as a New England winter garden.

"You shouldn't have gone to all this trouble, Mum," the old man protested, "with the work you have to do around here."

"Goodness, Godfrey, it was no trouble. I wish it could have been more."

"I'm trying to remember the last time I had a hand-knit sweater." Godfrey's voice was gruff as he fingered it. "It's just what I need to wear to the greenhouse these days. When on earth did you find the time?"

The sun came through to shine on the garden. "It's not very ele-

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gant, Godfrey, but it will keep you warm."

It was 28 years since Margaret Caswell had come to Wrightsville to nurse her sister Louise—Godfrey's wife—in Louise's fatal illness. In that time she had brought into the world a child of her own, buried her husband, become "Mum" to the three children growing up in the household—Godfrey's two and her one—and planned (she had recently figured it out) more than 30,000 meals. Well, Godfrey Mumford had earned her devotion; he had been a second father to her child.

She sometimes felt that Godfrey loved her Joanne more than his own twins; she felt it now, in the drawing room. For Godfrey was holding in his hands a leather desk set decorated with gold-leaf chrysanthemums, and his shrewd blue eyes were glittering like January ice. The set was the gift of Joanne, who was watching him with a smile.

"You're uncanny, Jo," Godfrey said. "It's taking advantage of an old man. This is beautiful."

Jo's smile turned to laughter. "With most men it's supposed to be done with steak and potatoes. You're a pushover for chrysanthemums. It's very simple."

"I suppose people think *I'm* very simple. A senile delinquent," Godfrey said softly.

A frail little man with a heavy crop of eyebrows above very bright eyes hooted at this. He was Godfrey Mumford's oldest friend, Wolcott Thorp, who had formerly taught anthropology at Merrimac University in Connhaven. For the past few years Thorp had been serving as curator of the Merrimac University Museum, where he had been developing his special interest, the cultural anthropology of West Africa.

"I'll contribute to your delinquency, too," Wolcott Thorp chuckled. "Here's something, Godfrey, that will help you waste your declining years."

"Why, it's a first edition of an Eighteenth Century work on mums!" Godfrey devoured the title page. "Wolcott, this is magnificent."

The old man clutched the tome. Only Jo Caswell sensed the weariness in his big body. To Wrightsville and the horticultural world he was the breeder of the celebrated Mumford's Majestic Mum, a double bloom on a single stem; he was a member of the Chrysanthemum Society of America and of chrysanthemum clubs in England, France, and Japan; his correspondence with fellow breeders and aficionados encompassed the globe. To Jo he was a gentle, kind, and troubled man, and he was dear to her heart.

"I'm grateful for all these kindnesses," Godfrey Mumford said. "It's a pity my response has to be to give you bad news. It's the wrong occasion, but I don't know when I'll have you all together under this

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roof again. Forgive me for what I'm about to tell you."

His daughter Ellen had an instinct for the quality and degree of trouble. By the flare of her nostrils she had sensed that what was coming was bad news indeed.

"Father—" she began.

But her father stopped her. "Let me tell this without interruption, Ellen. It's hard enough . . . When I retired in 1954, my estate was worth about five million dollars; the distribution in my will was based on that figure. Since that time, as you all know, I've pretty well neglected everything else in experimenting with the blending and hybridizing of mums."

Godfrey paused, took a deep breath. "I recently found out that I'm a fool. Or maybe it was fated. Anyway, the result is the same."

He glanced at the old book in his hands as if surprised to find it still there. Then he set it carefully on the coffee table and sat down on the crewel-fringed couch.

"I had put all my financial affairs in the hands of Truslow Addison's law firm. Where I made my mistake was in sticking with the status quo when Tru died and his son took over the practice. I should have known better. You remember, Christopher, what a wild youngster Tru Junior was—"

"Yes," said Christopher Mumford. "Father, you don't mean—"

"I'm afraid so," the old man said. "After young Tru died in that auto accident last May, the affairs of the law firm were found to be like a basket of broken eggs. You couldn't even make an omelet of them. Some of the funds in his trust he had simply gambled away; the rest vanished because of bad business judgment, stupid speculations, investments without rhyme or reason . . ."

His voice trailed away, and after a while the silence was cracked by the voice of Ellen Mumford Nash. Her slim and elegant figure was stiff with outrage.

"Are you saying, father, that you're without a *shilling?*"

Behind her Christopher made an abrupt move, extending his arm in a sort of forensic gesture, as if he were trying to argue away a legal point that threatened his whole case.

"You're joking, father. It can't be that bad. There's got to be something left out of so much loot."

"Hear me out," his father said heavily. "By liquidating assets I've managed to pay off all the creditors. This house and the property are mortgaged; there's not very much equity. I have an old annuity that will let Mum and Joanne and me live here decently, but on my death the income from it stops. I'll have to cut down my mums operation—"

Ellen broke in, bitter as the cold outside. "Damn your mums! If you'd stuck to growing seeds, the way you started, father, none of this would have happened. Left

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without a farthing! After all these years."

Godfrey had gone pale at her curse; otherwise his face showed nothing. He had apparently prepared himself well for the ordeal. "Your brother was right in one respect, Ellen. There is something valuable left—something that no one's known about. I want to show it to you."

Mumford rose and went over to the wall behind him. He pushed aside an oil painting of a vaseful of chrysanthemums, exposing a square-doored wall safe. His silent audience heard the faint clicking—more like a swishing—of a dial. He removed something, shut the door of the safe, and came back.

Ellen's breath came out in a whinny.

Her father's hand was holding up a magnificent pendant.

"You'll recall," the old man said, "that on my retirement I took a trip to the Far East to bone up on Oriental mums. Well, while I was in Japan I managed to get my hands on this beauty. I paid nowhere near what it's worth, although it cost me a lot of money. How could I pass this up? There are records authenticating it as a royal gift from the Emperor Komei, father of Meiji. It's known as the Imperial Pendant."

The gold links of the chain were exquisitely carved in the shape of tiny, intricate chrysanthemums; the pendant itself was a chrysanthemum, with an enormous diamond in the center surrounded by sixteen diamond petals. The superb gems, deep yellow in color, gathered the light in the room and cast it back in a shattering explosion.

"These stones are perfectly matched. The Emperor's agents searched the world to find enough of these rare yellow diamonds to complete the pendant. As a group, they're unique."

Ellen Nash's eyes, as hard as the gems, became slitted. She had never heard of Emperor Komei or the Imperial Pendant, but she was not invulnerable to beauty, especially when it had a high market value.

"Father, that must be worth a fortune."

"Believe it or not, it's been appraised at a million dollars." There was an arpeggio of gasps; and the warmth in Godfrey Mumford's voice expired, as if his pleasure had been chilled suddenly. "Well, you've seen it, so I'll put it back in the safe."

"For God's sake, father," cried Christopher, "not in a dinky little home safe! Why don't you put it in a bank vault?"

"Because I like to take it out every once in a while and look at it, son. I've had it here for a long time, and no one's stolen it yet. By the way, I'm the only one who knows the combination of the safe. I suppose I ought to leave a record of it, in case anything happens to me."

"I should think so!" said Ellen.

Godfrey's expression did not

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change. "I'll take care of it, Ellen."

He returned to the wall safe. When he faced them again, the painting hung in place and his hands were empty.

"So there's what's left of my estate," he said. "A piece of historic jewelry worth a million dollars." His fine face saddened now, as if he had reached the limit of self-discipline. "Wolcott, my old will included a bequest to you of a hundred thousand dollars to finance that expedition to West Africa you've always talked about."

"I know, Godfrey, I know," said Thorp.

"Now, when I die, I'm afraid your legacy will be only one-fifth that."

Wolcott Thorp made a face. "I'm getting too old for expeditions. Do we have to talk about these things?"

He said this in a mutter, as if the whole subject were painful to him. Godfrey Mumford turned mercifully to Margaret Caswell.

"Mum, I originally planned a bequest to you and Joanne of a quarter of a million dollar trust fund. Well, I'm not going to make you suffer for my mistake after giving me half your lifetime, at least any more than I can help. The inheritance tax will cut down the pie, but my new will takes ample care of you in a revised trust. I wanted you and Jo to know that."

He turned to Ellen and Christopher. "What's left, of course, will go to you children share and share alike. It isn't what I'd planned, and I know it won't be what you expected, but you'll have to make the best of it. I'm sorry."

"So," said Ellen with a little snap of her jaws, "am I."

"Oh, shut up, Ellen," her brother said.

And there was a silence.

It was broken by Joanne. "Well! Shall we drink a toast to the birthday boy?" And she made for the rest of the champagne she had ordered from Dunc MacLean in the Square (which was round), in High Village, leaving behind her a definitely dismal New Year's Eve party.

January 1, 1965 Christopher Mumford was suffering from an unfamiliar malady—some sort of malfunction of the glands, as he diagnosed it. His mood had changed overnight. He gulped a mouthful of air as cold and clean and heady as Joanne's night-before champagne, and blew it out with a happy snort, like a horse. Even the thought of his many creditors failed to depress him.

"What a scrumbumptious day!" he exulted. "What an absolutely virgin way to start the year! Let's mosey on up to the woods beyond the greenhouse. I'll race you, Jo—what do you say?"

Joanne giggled. "Don't be a chump. You'd fall flat on your tunkus after twenty yards. You're in

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pitiful physical condition, Chris, and you know it. Dissipated, is what."

"You're right, of course. As dissipated as father's estate," said Christopher cheerfully.

"You could still repair the damage."

"Gyms make me dizzy. No, it's hopeless."

"Nothing is hopeless unless you make it so."

"Beware! Little Coz is mounting her pulpit! I warn you, Jo, for some ridiculous reason I'm higher than the Mahoganies this morning. You simply can't spoil it."

"I don't want to. I *like* to see you happy. It's such a welcome change."

"Right again. In pursuance whereof, and since New Year's Day is the time for resolutions, I hereby resolve to restrict my coffin-nail intake, ration my poison-slupping, and consort only with incorruptible virgins, starting with you."

"How do you know I'm, well, incorruptible?"

"By me you are," said Christopher. "I ought to know. I've tried enough times."

"And that's a fact," said Jo in a rather grim tone. But then she laughed, and he laughed, too.

They skirted the big glasshouse, whose panes cast into the hard bright air a fireworks of sparks, and went on across a carpet of dead grass toward a noble stand of evergreens.

Christopher was happily conscious of Joanne beside him. Her stride was long and free, a no-nonsense sort of locomotion that managed to emphasize her secondary sex characteristics, which were notable. And not even the wool stockings and the thick-soled walking shoes could spoil as captivating a pair of legs as his connoisseur's eye had ever studied.

"You implied that I'm different when I'm happy," Christopher said.

"You certainly are."

"Well, I've been feeling different this morning, and I couldn't figure it. Now I can. I'm not different—I'm the same old rounder I've always been. What I am is, I'm responding to a fresh stimulus. You, Cousin. It's you who spell the difference."

"Thank you, sir," said Jo.

"Oh, before this I've gone through the battlefield maneuvers with you, but I didn't actually *notice* you. You know what I mean?"

"I'm getting a clue," said Jo warily.

"But now I *am*. I mean I'm noticing *you*, Cousin. In the aggregate, as it were, not merely here and there. Am I communicating? What does it mean?"

"It means you're bored, and you've decided to make a little time to while away your boredom."

"Not at all. Suddenly you've turned into a marvelously desirable piece of goods."

"And you're the susceptible buyer."

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"Not the way you mean. You forget that I make my way boards-treading. I'm used to desirable women—the theater is lousy with them. So much so that I've been in danger of turning monk."

"Then why are you tickling my hand?"

"Because I've decided against celibacy. With your permission I'll go further. I'll put my arm around you."

"Permission denied. I've been through *that* maneuver before with you, and it leads to a major battle. We'll sit here on this log for a while and rest. Then we'll go back."

They sat. It was cold. They sat closer—for warmth, Joanne told herself.

"Gosh, it's wonderful," breathed Christopher in little puffs, like smoke.

"What's wonderful?"

"How things change. When we were kids I thought you were the world's biggest stinker."

"I couldn't stand you, either. There are times when I still can't. Like last night."

"Last night? Why, I was a model of deportment!"

"You don't know your father well, do you?"

"Father? As well as anybody."

"Your gift to him didn't show it. Nor Ellen's —Uncle Godfrey hasn't smoked in years. And you gave him a cane, for heaven's sake! Don't you realize Uncle Godfrey's too proud to use a cane? He'd never admit dependence that way."

Christopher Mumford had to admit to himself that her indictment was justified. He had bought the walking stick (on credit) without any real consideration of his father's needs or wants.

"You're right," he sighed. "What with handling father's correspondence and puttering around after him in the greenhouse, you've come to know him better than his own children."

They went on sitting on the log and holding hands. Jo had to hold his hands very firmly.

January 3 Breakfast was not a ritual at the Mumfords', but a certain deference was customarily shown to the head of the house. Family and guests, barring illness or improbably late hours the night before, were encouraged to present themselves promptly at 9:00, which was the time Godfrey Mumford invariably appeared.

Christopher, still floating in his euphoria, came downstairs a good 20 minutes ahead of schedule. He was astonished to find his distaff counterpart in the breakfast room before him. Ellen, the one member of the family traditionally AWOL from the morning meal, on this morning was lounging in a spot of sunshine with a cup of Margaret Caswell's rich coffee in her hand.

"I knew it, I knew it," Christopher said. "A day for miracles.

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Imagine finding you on your feet at this proletarian hour."

Ellen glared at him through the aromatic steam. "What makes you so cheerful of late? It's disgusting."

"Something rare has entered my life. As the ecclesiastical arm puts it, I have been uplifted in spirit."

Ellen sniffed. "You? Confessing to a tardy conversion? It would be too simply dreary."

"Hell, no, nothing so primitive." Chris spread himself over a chair and inhaled deeply of the delicious smells from the kitchen. "Although God knows neither of us has much to be cheerful about, I grant you."

"That's why I was hoping to catch you alone before breakfast." Ellen's tone expressed her resentment of the radical recourse forced upon her. "You may not realize it, Chris, but you've been pretty slimy lately. Is the sisterly eye mistaken, or aren't you being awfully attentive to our little country cousin? You aren't casting her for a role in some dirty drama you're working on, are you?"

"Don't be foul," said Christopher shortly. "And Jo's no yokel. Just because she hasn't had the advantage of living in London and acquiring a vocabulary of British clichés—"

"Bless my soul and whiskers." The saccharine in Ellen's smile was chemically combined with acid. "Lord Ironpants has suddenly developed a tender spot."

"Never *mind*. Just what did you want to talk about?"

"Father's performance the other night. What did you think of it?"

"Top hole, pip-pip, stiff upper, and all that."

"Do you suppose he was telling the whole truth?"

"Father? Of course. You know father isn't capable of a deliberate deception."

"I wonder," said Ellen thoughtfully.

"Don't be silly. He was giving it to us straight."

"Aren't you being terribly indifferent to it all? In my opinion, it's no trifle having your inheritance reduced from millions to thousands by your father's stupidity and the venality of some crooked solicitor. There must be *something* we can do about it."

"Sure—grin and bear it. It isn't as if we'll have to go on relief, Ellen. There ought to be several hundred thou' at least to be divided between us after taxes. In the parlance of Wrightsville, that ain't hay."

"It 'ain't' five million, either. Honestly, I'm so furious with father I could spit!"

Christopher grinned. Ellen's rage made her almost human. "Chin up, old girl," he said, not unfondly. "It's the Empiah tradition, y'know."

"Oh, go to hell! I don't know why I bother to discuss anything with you."

Jo Caswell entered the breakfast room at that moment, looking lusciously slim and young in a heather wool dress, and bringing in with

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her, Christopher was prepared to swear, a personal escort of sunshine. He immediately quit the natural variety for Jo's peculiar radiance; and Ellen, finding herself a crowd, withdrew disdainfully to the other end of the table.

Jo's mother, starchily aproned, appeared in the doorway from the kitchen. "Is Godfrey down?"

"Not yet, Mum," Jo said.

"That's funny. It's a quarter past nine by the kitchen clock. He's always on time."

Ellen snapped, "Obviously, he's sometimes not."

Worry lines were showing between Mum's faded eyes. "In all the years I've been here, your father's never been late for his breakfast except when he was ill."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Mum," said Jo, "he's probably gone out to the greenhouse and lost track of the time. It isn't as if it were two in the afternoon."

But Mum Caswell shook her head stubbornly. "I'm going to look in his room."

"What a bloody bore." Ellen's impatience turned nasty. "What about my breakfast? Am I expected to get it myself?"

"Perish the thought!" said Christopher, anticipating Jo.

Nevertheless, Mum hurried out. Ellen brandished her empty coffee cup, ready to behead the peasant who had failed to refill it. Christopher appeased his hunger by devouring Joanne, who was trying valiantly not to let her dislike for Ellen show.

Silence poured.

Until the cry from upstairs.

It was a cry raucous with urgency and terror. And then it became a shriek, and the shriek repeated itself.

Joanne bolted for the doorway and vanished, Christopher at her heels. Ellen trailed behind, her face a curious study in dread and hope.

She came on the others midway up the staircase. Her aunt was clinging to the banister, her dumpling features the color of old dough. She managed a jerky thumb-up gesture, and Jo and Christopher sprang past her and disappeared in the upstairs hall. In a moment Jo was back alone, running down the stairs, past her mother, past Ellen.

"I've got to phone the doctor," Jo panted. "Ellen, please take care of mother."

"But what's the matter?" demanded Ellen. "Is it father? Has something happened to him?"

"Yes . . ." Jo flew for the phone. Ellen, ascending with an arm around Margaret Caswell's waist, heard the dial clacking, and then Joanne's urgent voice: "Dr. Farnham? Jo Caswell at the Mumford place. Uncle Godfrey's had a stroke, I think. Can you come right away?"

Dr. Conklin Farnham took the stairs two at a time. Mum, still dough-faced but recovered from the first shock, had insisted on return-

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ing to her brother-in-law's bedside; the doctor found her there. Christopher and Ellen, acting like trespassers, hung about in the hall outside their father's room, Joanne with them. They waited without words.

When Dr. Farnham emerged, his shoulders elevated in a chilling shrug. "He's had a stroke, all right. He's paralyzed."

"Poor pop," said Christopher. He had not called his father that in twenty years. "What's the prognosis, Doctor?"

"It depends on a number of things, most of them unpredictable."

"Any chance of a recovery from the paralysis, Dr. Farnham?" Joanne asked in a tight voice.

"The paralysis will gradually lift, but just how soon or how completely I can't say. It all depends on the extent of the damage. He ought to be in the hospital, but we're absolutely jammed just now, not a bed available, even in the wards. And I'd rather not risk the long jaunt up to Connhaven on these winter roads. So it looks like a home job, at least for now. He'll need nurses—"

"How about me?" asked Margaret Caswell, materializing in the doorway.

"Well." The doctor seemed doubtful. "I know you've done your share of patient-care, Mrs. Caswell, but in a case like this . . . Although it's true we haven't got an R.N. available right now, either . . ."

"I've taken care of Godfrey for over a quarter of a century," Mum Caswell said, with the obstinacy she showed in all matters pertaining to Godfrey Mumford. "I can take care of him now."

January 4-5 The first 48 hours after a cerebral thrombosis, Dr. Farnham told them, were the critical ones, which was all Mum had to hear. For the next two days and nights she neither took her clothes off nor slept; nor was there anything Joanne could do or say to move her from Godfrey Mumford's bedside, not even for ten minutes.

When the crisis was over, and the patient had survived—and was even making, according to the doctor, a sensational recovery—Jo and Ellen were finally able to pry Mum out of the sickroom and get her to lie down for a few hours. She fell asleep smiling triumphantly, as if she had scored a hand-to-hand victory over the Grim Reaper.

Wolcott Thorp, apprised by Christopher of the stroke, drove down from Connhaven on the night of the fifth, looking like a miniature Russian in his old-fashioned greatcoat and astrakhan hat.

"Godfrey's all right, isn't he? He's going to live?"

They reassured him; and he sank into a chair in the foyer, beside the little table with the silver salver on it. "All my old friends are going," he mumbled. He was so pale that Joanne got him some brandy. "And those of us who survive feel guilty

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and overjoyed at the same time. What swine people are . . ."

It was some time before he was able to go upstairs and look in on the patient, who was being tended again by Margaret Caswell. For ten minutes Thorp chattered to his friend with desperate animation, as Godfrey stared helplessly back at him; until, clearing his throat repeatedly as if he himself had developed a paralysis, Thorp allowed Mum to shoo him out.

"It's too much to have to watch," Thorp told Jo and the twins downstairs. "I'm too big a coward to sit there while he struggles with that paralysis. The way he tried to talk! I'm going home."

"But you can't, Uncle Wolcott," said Jo, giving him the courtesy title she had used since childhood. "It's started to snow, and the report on the radio is that it's going to be a heavy one. I'm not going to let you take that long drive back over slippery roads. The plows won't even have had time to go over them."

"But Joanne," said the old curator weakly, "I have a huge day tomorrow at the Museum. And really, I'd rather—"

"I don't *care* what you'd rather. You're not leaving this house tonight, and that's that."

"Jo's right, you know," Christopher put in. "Anyway, Uncle Wolcott, you don't stand a chance. This is the new Joanne. Look at that chin, will you?"

"You look at it," said his sister Ellen. "Oh, hell, why did I ever come home? Who's for a snack?"

January 6 The snow had fallen through half the night. From the kitchen window Christopher could look out across the white earth, an old bed with fresh sheets, past the glasshouse to the woods, where the conifers stood green among the sleeping nudes.

From behind him came a rattle of pans and the homely hiss of bacon; all around him, creeping like woodsmoke, lay warmth. Making the sounds and evoking the smells was Joanne; when her mother had turned nurse, Jo had taken over the housekeeping and cooking chores. Chris had promptly given himself the KP assignment for breakfast.

It was not a morning for fantasy; the day was too clear, the smells too real—it should have happened on a black night, with wind tearing at the house to an accompaniment of creaks. But, as Jo and Chris later agreed over clutched hands, perhaps that was what made it so creepy—the dreadful nightmare striking on a crisp morning to the smell of frying bacon.

For at the very instant that Christopher turned away from the window with a wisecrack about to part his lips—at the very instant that he opened his mouth—he screamed. Or so it seemed. But it was a fantastic coincidence of timing. The scream was hysterically feminine

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and originated upstairs. It was repeated and repeated in a wild fusillade.

Jo stood fixed at the kitchen range with the long fork in her hand; then she cried, "*Mother!*" and flung the fork down and ran for the doorway as if the kitchen had burst into flames. And Chris ran after her.

In the hallway stood Wolcott Thorp, one leg raised like an elderly stork, caught in the act of putting on his galoshes in preparation for his return to Connhaven. The curator was gaping at the staircase. At the top of the flight sagged Margaret Caswell, hanging on to the banister with one hand, while her other hand clawed at her throat.

And as she saw Jo and Christopher, Mum screeched, "He's dead, he's dead," and began to topple, ever so slowly, as in a film, so that Joanne, streaking past old Thorp, was able to catch her just before she could tumble. And Christopher followed, bounding up the stairs. He collided with his sister on the landing.

"What is it?" yelled Ellen; she was in a hastily donned robe. "What in God's name has happened now?"

"It must be father." Christopher dodged around her, shouting over his shoulder, "Come on, Ellen! I may need help."

In the hall below, activated at last, Wolcott Thorp hopped for the phone, one unhooked galosh flapping. He found Dr. Farnham's number jotted on a pad for ready reference and dialed it. The doctor, located at Wrightsville General Hospital, where he was making his morning rounds, would come at once. Thorp hung up, stared for a moment at the telephone, then dialed Operator.

"Operator," he said, swallowing. "Get me the police."

Chief of Police Anselm Newby cradled the phone cautiously, as if it might respond to rougher treatment by snapping at him, like a dog. He inclined his almost delicate frame over his desk and fixed bleak eyes, of an inorganic blue, on his visitor. The visitor, relaxing on the back on his neck, had the sudden feeling that he was unwelcome, which was ridiculous.

"Ellery," said Chief Newby, "why the hell don't you stay in New York?"

Ellery slid erect, blinking. "I beg your pardon?"

"Where you belong," said the Chief in a rancorous tone. "Go home, will you?"

A manifest injustice. Home, thought Ellery, is where the heart is, and for many years he had had a special coronary weakness for Wrightsville. He had arrived in town only yesterday on one of his spur-of-the-moment visits; and, of course, the very first thing this morning he had sought out the Chief in police headquarters at the County Court House Building.

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"What," Ellery inquired, "brings this on? Here we were, wallowing in remembrance of things past, warm as a pair of tea cosies. In a moment I become *persona non grata*. It's obviously the telephone call. What's happened?"

"Damn it, Ellery, every time you come to Wrightsville a major crime is committed."

Ellery sighed. It was not the first time he had been so indicted. Before Newby's tenure there had been the salty old Yankee, Chief Dakin, with his sorrowful accusations. It's a continuing curse, he thought, that's what it is.

"Who is it this time?"

"They've just found Godfrey Mumford. That was a friend of his, Wolcott Thorp, on the phone, to notify me of Mumford's murder."

"Old Mumford? The Chrysanthemum King?"

"That's the one. I suppose there's nothing I can do but invite you along. Are you available?"

Mr. Q, rising slowly, was available, if with reluctance. His Wrightsville triumphs invariably left an aftertaste of ashes.

"Let's go," said Wrightsville's perennial hoodoo.

Christopher, dressed for the snow, blundered on Joanne on his way to the front door. She was crouched on the second step of the staircase, hugging her knees. Jo had not cried, but her eyes were pink with pain.

"You need fresh air," prescribed Christopher. "How about it?"

"No, Chris. I don't feel like it."

"I'm just trundling around the house."

"What for?"

"Come see."

He held out his hand. After a moment she took it and pulled herself up. "I'll get my things on."

Hand in hand they trudged around the house, leaving a double perimeter of footprints in the deep snow. Eventually they came back to where they had started.

"Did you notice?" Christopher asked darkly.

"Notice? What?"

"The snow."

"I could hardly not notice it," said Joanne. "I got some in the top of one of my boots."

"Tracks."

"What?"

"There aren't any."

"There are, too," said Jo. "A double set. We just made them."

"Exactly."

"Oh, stop talking like a character in a book," Joe said crossly. "What are you driving at?"

"*We* left a double set of footprints," said Christopher. "Just now. But nobody else left any. Where are the tracks of the murderer?"

"Oh," said Jo; and it was a chilled, even a tremulous "Oh"—like a little icicle preparing to fall to bits.

They stood there looking at each

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other, Jo shivering, like a scared and forlorn child.

He opened his arms. She crept into them.

It was Ellen who answered the door. She had used the short wait to recover her poise; she had, so to speak, raised the Union Jack. Chief Anselm Newby stepped in, followed by Ellery.

"You're the Chief Constable," Ellen said. "The last time I was in Wrightsville, Dakin was Constable."

Newby received this intelligence with a displeasure that even Ellen Nash recognized. In Anse Newby's glossary, constables were exceedingly small potatoes, found in tiny, dying New England villages.

"Chief of Police," he corrected her. Professionally he used a quiet voice, with an occasional whiplash overtone. He evidently felt that this was such an occasion, for his correction flicked out at her, leaving a visible mark. "The name is Newby. This is Ellery Queen, and he's not a constable, either. Who are you?"

"Mrs. Nash—Ellen Mumford Nash, Mr. Mumford's daughter," said Ellen hastily. "I've been visiting over the holidays from England." This last she uttered in a defiant, even arrogant, tone, as if invoking the never-setting sun. It made Newby examine her with his mineral eyes.

The tension Ellery detected under the woman's gloss was clearly shared by the group huddled in the entrance hall behind her. His glance sorted them out with the automatic ease of much practice. The handsome young fellow was obviously the brother of the constable-oriented Anglophile, and he was (just as obviously) feeling proprietary about the grave and lovely girl whose elbow he gripped. Ellery became aware of a familiar pang. What quality in Wrightsville is this, he thought, that it must cast in every murder melodrama at least one ingenue with a special talent for touching the heart?

His glance passed on to the snow-haired lady, fallen in with exhaustion; and to the little elderly gentleman with the jungle eyebrows and the musty aura of old things, undoubtedly the Wolcott Thorp who had announced the finding of the body to Anse Newby over the phone. Newby, it appeared, knew Thorp; they shook hands, Thorp absently, as if his thoughts were elsewhere—upstairs, in fact, as indeed they were.

When the Chief introduced Ellery, it turned out that some of them had heard of him. He would have preferred anonymity. But this was almost always the toe he stubbed in stumbling over a skeleton in some Wrightsville closet.

"Rodge and Joan Fowler were talking about you only a few weeks ago," Joanne murmured. "To listen to them, Mr. Queen, you're a cross between a bulldog and a

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bloodhound when it comes to—things like this. You remember, Chris, how they raved."

"I certainly do," Christopher said gloomily. He said nothing more, and Ellery looked at him. But all Ellery said was, "Oh, you know the Fowlers?" Then he was being introduced to Ellen.

"*That* Queen," said Ellen. Ellery could have sworn, from the way her nostrils flared, that he was giving off unsocial odors. And *she* said nothing more.

"Well," the Chief of Police said in a rubbing-the-hands tone of voice, "where's the body? And did anybody notify a doctor?"

"I did, just before I telephoned you," Wolcott Thorp said. "He's waiting in Godfrey's bedroom."

"Before we go up," suggested Ellery—and they all started—"would you people mind telling us how the body was found, and so on? To fill us in."

They told their stories in detail up to the point of the call to headquarters.

Newby nodded. "That's clear enough. Let's go."

So they went upstairs, Margaret Caswell leading the way, followed by Newby and Ellery, with the others straggling behind.

The old man was lying on the floor beside his bed. He lay on his back, his eyes fixed in the disconcerting stare of death. The front of his pajama coat was clotted with the seepage from the knife wound in his chest. There had been very little bleeding. A black-handled knife trimmed in what looked like nickel protruded from the region of his heart.

"Hello, Conk," Ellery said to the doctor, but looking at the corpse.

"Ellery," Dr. Farnham exclaimed. "When did you get to town?"

"Last night. Just in time, as usual." Ellery was still looking at the dead man. "How's Molly?"

"Blooming—"

"Never mind Old Home Week," said Newby irritably. "What's your educated guess, Doctor, as to the time he got it?"

"Between four and five a.m., I'd say. A good spell after the snow stopped, if that's what you're thinking of."

"Speaking of the snow," said Ellery, looking up. "Who made that double set of tracks around the house I noticed on driving up?"

"Joanne and I," said Christopher from between his teeth.

"Oh? When did you make them, Mr. Mumford?"

"This morning."

"You and Miss Caswell walked all around the house?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice any tracks in the snow other than those you and Miss Caswell were making?" After a moment Ellery said, "Mr. Mumford?"

"No."

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"Not anywhere around the house?"

"No!"

"Thank you," Ellery said. "I could remark that that's very helpful, but I can understand that you ladies and gentlemen may have a different point of view. It means no one entered or left the house after the snow stopped falling. It means the murder was committed by someone *in the house*—someone, moreover, who's still here."

"That's what it means, all right," said Chief Newby with undisguised satisfaction. He was inching carefully about the room, his bleak glance putting a touch of frost on everything.

"That was intelligent of you, Chris," Ellen Nash said viciously. "So now we're all under suspicion. What a bloody farce!"

"You've got the wrong category, I'm afraid," her brother said morosely. "As one of us, I suppose, is going to find out."

There was a dreary moment. Jo's fresh face held a look of complete incredulity, as if the full meaning of the trackless snow had just now struck home. Ellen was staring over at her recumbent father, her expression saying that it was all his fault. Margaret Caswell leaned against the door, her lips moving without a sound. Christopher took out a pack of cigarettes, held it awkwardly for a moment, then put it back in his pocket. Wolcott Thorp mumbled something about the absolute impossibility of it all; his tone said he wished he were back in his museum among the relics of the legitimately dead.

"The knife," Ellery said. He was looking down again at Godfrey Mumford's torso. "The fact that the killer left it behind, Newby, undoubtedly means that it's useless as a clue. If it had any fingerprints on it, they probably were wiped off."

"We'll dust the room and knife for prints, anyway," said the Chief. "Don't any of you come any further than that doorway . . . Not that it's going to do us any good, as you say, Ellery. You people—I take it you've all been in this bedroom in the last day or so at one time or another?" He shrugged at their nods.

"By the way," Ellery said, "I haven't seen one of these old-fashioned jackknives in years. Does anyone recognize it? Mrs. Caswell?"

"It's Godfrey's," Mum said stiffly. "He kept it on the writing desk there. It was one of his prized possessions. He'd had it from childhood."

"He never carried it around with him?"

"I've never seen it anywhere but on his desk. He was very sentimental about it . . . He used it as a letter opener."

"I have a boyhood artifact or two myself that I'm inclined to treasure. Did everyone know this, Mrs. Caswell?"

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"Everyone in the household—" She stopped with a squeak of her breath—like, Ellery thought, a screech of brakes. But he pretended not to notice. Instead, he knelt to pick something up from the floor beside the body.

"What's that?" demanded Chief Newby.

"It's a memo pad," Dr. Farnham said unexpectedly. "It was kept on the night table at my suggestion for notations of temperature, time of medications, and so on. It apparently fell off the table when Mr. Mumford toppled from the bed; he must have jostled the table. When I got here the pad was lying on the body. I threw it aside in making my examination."

"Then it doesn't mean anything," the Chief began; but Ellery, back on his feet, staring at the top sheet of the pad, said, "I disagree. Unless . . . Conk, did Mr. Mumford regain any mobility since his stroke?"

"Quite a bit," replied Dr. Farnham. "He was making a far better and faster recovery than I expected."

"Then this pad explains why he fell out of bed in the first place, Newby—why, with that knife wound, he didn't simply die where he lay after being struck."

"How do you figure that? You know how they'll thrash around sometimes when they're dying. What does the pad have to do with it?"

"The pad," said Ellery, "has this to do with it: after his murderer left him, thinking he was dead, Godfrey Mumford somehow found the strength to raise himself to a sitting position, reach over to the night table, pick up the pencil and pad—you'll find the pencil under the bed, along with the top sheet of the pad containing the medical notations, where they must have fallen when he dropped them—and blockprinted a message. The dying message, Newby, on this pad."

"What dying message?" Newby pounced. "Let me see that! Had he recovered enough from the paralysis, Doc, to be able to *write?*"

"With considerable effort, Chief, yes."

The dead man's message consisted of one word, and Newby pronounced it again, like a contestant in a spelling bee.

"MUM," he read. "Capital M, capital U, capital M—MUM."

In the silence, fantasy crept. It made no sense of the normal sort at all.

MUM.

"What on earth could Godfrey have meant?" Wolcott Thorp exclaimed. "What a queer thing to write when he was dying!"

"Queer, Mr. Thorp," Ellery said, "is the exact word."

"I don't think so," said the Chief with a grin. "It won't do, Ellery. I don't say I always believe what's in front of my nose, but if there's a simple explanation, why duck it?

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Everybody in town knows that Mrs. Caswell here is called Mum, and has been for over twenty-five years. If Godfrey meant to name his killer, then it's a cinch this thing on the pad refers to her. No embroidery, Ellery—it's open and shut."

"What—what *rot!*" Joanne cried, jumping to her mother's side. "Mother *loved* Uncle Godfrey. You know what you are, Chief Newby? You're a—you're a nitwit! Isn't he, Mr. Queen?"

"I would like to think about it," said Mr. Queen, staring at the pad.

January 9 It is a fact that must be recorded, at whatever peril to his reputation, that Mr. Queen had achieved in Wrightsville the status of a professional house guest. In more than two decades he had proved a miserably meager source of revenue to the Hollis Hotel. No sooner did he check in, it seemed, than he was checking out again. Let it be said in his defense that this was not the result of parsimony. It was simply because of his flair for entangling himself in Wrightsville's private lives and, as a consequence, being invited to Wrightsville's relevant private homes.

The invitation to move over to the Mumfords' was extended by an unhilarious Christopher at the iron plea of Joanne. Jo's motive was transparent enough; Ellery was not sufficiently vain to suppose it had anything to do with moonlight and roses. With Chief Newby breathing down her mother's neck, Jo had sensed an ally; she wanted Ellery not only on her side morally, but physically at hand.

Which explains why, on the morning of January ninth, Ellery settled his account at the checkout desk of the Hollis and, lugging his suitcases like ballast on either side, tacked briskly toward the northwest arc of the Square. Crossing Upper Dade Street, he luffed past the Wrightsville National Bank, Town Hall, and the Our Boys Memorial at the entrance to Memorial Park, and finally made the side entrance of the County Court House Building. In police headquarters he paused long enough to register his change of address with Chief Newby, who received the announcement with an unenthusiastic nod.

"Any luck with the fingerprinting, by the way?" Ellery asked.

"All kinds of it. We found *everybody's* fingerprints in the bedroom. But not a one on the jackknife. Wiped clean, all right." Newby scowled. "Who'd have thought a nice little housekeeper like Mum Caswell would have the know-how to remove her prints or wear gloves?"

"If you're so certain she killed Mumford, why don't you make the pinch?"

"On what evidence? That MUM message?" The Chief threw up his

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hands. "Imagine the corned-beef hash a defense lawyer would make of *that* in court. Ellery, find something for me in that house, will you?"

"I'll do my best," said Ellery. "Although it may not turn out to be for you."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm concerned with the truth, Anse. You're merely concerned with the facts," said Ellery.

And he left—before Newby could reply.

Ellery commandeered a taxicab driven, to his surprise, by someone he did not recognize, and was trundled off (after circling the Square) back up broad-bottomed State Street to the oldest part of town, where the houses were black-shuttered pre-Colonials well set back on rolling lawns in the shade of centuries-old trees. And soon he was ringing the chimes-doorbell of the Mumford mansion.

It was the day after Mumford's funeral, and the big house was still haunted. The old man's presence seemed to linger in the sight and scent of his precious chrysanthemums, which in lesser greenhouses bore their blooms from late August to December.

Joanne let him in with a glad little cry.

She established him in a tall-ceilinged bedroom upstairs with a tester bed and a beautiful Duncan Phyfe highboy that he instantaneously coveted. But he was made melancholy by the vase of two-headed mums that Jo had set on the night table, and he soon descended in search of fleshlier company.

He found Jo, Ellen, and Christopher in the library, and it became clear at once that the exercise of his peculiar gifts, at least as far as Ellen Nash was concerned, was her charge for his lodging.

"I'm not going to dignify for one moment the absurd conclusion that one of us murdered father," Ellen said. "He was done in by some maniac, or tramp or something—"

"The snow," her brother said damply.

"To hell with the snow! What I'm interested in is that father left a million dollars' worth of pendant in his wall safe, and I want that safe opened."

"Pendant?" said Ellery. "What pendant?"

So Christopher told him all about the New Year's Eve party, and what Godfrey Mumford had told them, and how he had exhibited the Imperial Pendant to them and then returned it to the safe.

"And he also told us," Christopher concluded, "that he was the only one who knew the safe combination. He said he was going to make a note of the combination for us. But we haven't looked for it yet."

"I have," said Ellen, "and I can't find it. So that your stay here won't be a complete waste of time, Mr. Queen, why not show us how Su-

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perman detects? A little thing like finding a safe combination should barely test your reputation."

"Do we have to worry about the pendant *now?*" asked Jo.

"It shouldn't take too long, Miss Caswell," said Ellery. To himself he was saying: maybe a million dollars' worth of jewelry has something to do with where Godfrey's boyhood knife had finally rested.

Searches were Ellery's forte, but this one defeated him. Trailed by relatives of the deceased, he squandered the rest of the morning looking in obvious places. But unlike Poe's purloined letter, the combination of the safe was nowhere to be found.

They took time out for lunch and an inventory of the unlikelier places, and the afternoon passed in exhausting this inventory. Then time out again, and over dinner a round-table discussion of other possibilities, however remote. Mr. Queen's fame as a sleuth clearly underwent reappraisal by at least one conferee present. And Mr. Queen himself grew visibly more quiet.

After dinner Ellen returned to the search of the files she had already ransacked once. Ellery, reminding himself bravely in the face of his failure that there was, after all, more than one way to flay a kitty, took Christopher aside.

"I'm prompted," Ellery announced, "to go directly to the source of the problem—namely, to the safe itself. Can you show me where the blamed thing is?"

"What do you have in mind?" asked Christopher. "Nitro?"

"Nothing so common. A bit of fiddling with the dial, à la Jimmy Valentine."

"Who's he?"

Ellery said sadly, "Never mind."

Christopher led him to the drawing room and, turning on the lights, went to the chrysanthemum painting on the wall and pushed it aside. Ellery began to flex his fingers like a violin virtuoso before a recital.

He studied the thing. The safe door was about ten inches square and in the middle was a rotating dial about six inches in diameter. Etched into the circumference of the dial were 26 evenly spaced notches numbered in sequence from 1 to 26. Around the dial Ellery saw a narrow immovable ring or collar in the top of which was set a single unnumbered notch—the notch used for aligning the numbers of the combination when opening the safe.

In the center of the dial was a bulky knob, about half the diameter of the dial itself, and on the knob was etched the manufacturer's trademark—an outline of the god of metal-working, Vulcan; around the rim of the knob appeared the manufacturer's name and address: VULCAN SAFE & LOCK COMPANY, INC., NEW HAVEN, CONN.

The safe door was locked. Ellery duly fiddled with the dial, ear

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cocked à la Jimmy Valentine. Nothing happened—at least, to the safe door. What did happen was the entrance into the drawing room of Ellen, in a sort of half excitement, trailed by a disdainful Joanne.

"Ah, the ladies," said Ellery, trying to cover up his chagrin. "And have you found the combination to this stubborn little brute?"

"No," Ellen said, "but we've found this. Maybe it'll tell you something."

Ellery took the sheet of paper. It was a bill of sale for the wall safe.

"Dated nine years ago." He pinched his nose, which was itching. "Must have been ordered just after he got back from that trip to the Orient you told me about, when he acquired the Imperial Pendant. Especially ordered, then, to be the repository of the pendant. Invoice tallies—same name and address of manufacturer; terse description, 'Wall safe per order.'"

"That's it," said Christopher. "No doubt about it."

"Is it important, Mr. Queen?" asked Jo, in spite of herself.

"It could be mighty important, Miss Caswell. While I have fiddled and burned, you may have discovered a treasure."

"Then you have better eyes than I," said Ellen. "Anyway, where do we go from here?"

"Patience, Mrs. Nash. Chris, I want you to take a trip to New Haven. Check out the safe company and learn everything you can about this particular model—details of the original order, any special instructions accompanying the order—and, yes, check the price, which seems very high to me. Also, the Vulcan Company may have the combination on file, which would simplify matters. If they don't, hire one of their experts to come back with you, in case we have to force the safe.

"Meanwhile, you girls keep searching for a record of the combination. Cover every room in the house. Not excluding the greenhouse."

January 11 Christopher's return taxi from the Wrightsville airport produced a clamor. Jo flew into the foyer from the direction of the kitchen, followed by Mum; Ellen descended from upstairs in jumps. Ellery, a lonely stag, was meandering among the red spruce and birch outside; and Joanne, booted and mackinawed, was dispatched to fetch him.

Assembled in the drawing room, they saw from Christopher's expression that he was no courier of good news.

"Briefly," Christopher told them, "the Vulcan Safe and Lock Company, Inc. no longer exists. The plant and all its files were destroyed by a fire in 1958. The firm never went back into business. Fellow sufferers, I return to your bosoms with nothing—not a clue, not a rec-

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ord of anything connected with the purchase of the safe."

"The high price," Ellery asked, frowning. "Did you remember to check the price?"

"Right. I did. And you were. Right, I mean. The price father paid was just about twice what safes of similar size and type were bringing the year he ordered it. It's funny that father would let himself be skinned that way. He may have been careless about his lawyer, but he was a good enough businessman, after all, to have made millions in packaged seeds before he went chrysanthemum-happy."

"There was nothing wrong with your father's business sense, Chris," said Ellery. "Nothing at all." And his eyes promptly went into hiding.

Ellen, who held a more cynical view of her late sire, was clearly of the opinion that the father's simplicity had been passed on to his son. "Didn't you at least bring back a safe expert to open the bloody thing?"

"No, but I got in touch with another New Haven safe outfit, and they'll send a man up as soon as I phone them."

"Then do it. Put through a trunk call right now. What kind of fool are you?"

Christopher's ears had turned a lovely magenta. "And you, sister mine, you're a greedy little devil. You're so hot to lay your hands on that pendant that you've lost the few decent instincts you used to have. You've waited this long, can't you wait another couple of days? Father's hardly settled in his grave."

"Please," murmured Mum.

"Please!" cried Jo.

His reflections disturbed by the sibling colloquy, Ellery roused himself. "It may not be necessary to call in anybody. Your father left a dying message—MUM. Chief Newby is positive that Godfrey was leaving a clue to his killer's identity—Mum Caswell here. But if Godfrey meant to identify his murderer, why did he choose to write MUM? MUM can mean a great many different things, which I shan't go into now; but, as an identification, it's an ambiguity. Had he wanted to accuse Mrs. Caswell, he could simply have written down her initials, MC. If he'd meant to accuse Joanne or Mr. Thorp—JC or WT. One of his children? 'Son' or 'daughter'—or *their* initials. Any one of which would have been specific and unmistakable.

"I choose to proceed, then," Ellery went on, "on the assumption that Godfrey, in writing MUM, did not mean his killer.

"Now. What had he promised to leave for you? The combination of the safe containing the only considerable asset in his estate. So his dying message may have been meant to be the safe combination. If so, the theory can be tested."

Going to the painting, he pushed it aside. Entranced, they trooped after him.

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"Study this dial for a moment," Ellery said. "What do you see? Twenty-six numbered notches. And what does twenty-six suggest? *The number of letters in the alphabet!*

"So let's translate M-U-M into numbers. M is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, U the twenty-first. Safe combination: 13-21-13. Now first we twirl the dial a few revolutions—to clear the action, so to speak. Then we turn to 13 and set it directly under the alignment notch—there. Next we turn the dial to the right—we'll try that direction first—and align the 21. And now to the left—usually the directions alternate—back to 13."

Ellery paused. The crucial instant was at hand. There was no movement behind him, not even a breath.

He took hold of the knob and pulled, gently.

The thick, heavy door of the safe swung open.

A shout of triumph went up—and died as if guillotined.

The safe was empty. Utterly. No pendant, no jewel box, not even a scrap of paper.

Later that day, true to his commitment, Ellery visited Anse Newby at police headquarters and reported the opening of the safe, including its emptiness.

"So what have you accomplished?" the Chief growled. "Somebody killed the old man, opened the safe, swiped the pendant. That doesn't knock my theory over. It just gives us the motive."

"You think so?" Ellery squeezed his lower lip. "I don't. According to everyone's testimony, Godfrey told them he was the only one who knew the combination. Did one of them figure out the M-U-M combination before I did and beat me to the safe? Possible, but I consider it unlikely, if you'll pardon the self-puff. It takes experienced follow-through thinking to make the jump from M-U-M to 13-21-13."

"All right, try this," argued Newby. "Somebody sneaked downstairs in the middle of that night and got lucky."

"I don't believe in that sort of luck. Anyway, it would call on one of them to be a mighty good actor."

"One of them is an actor."

"But, I gather, not a good one."

"Or maybe she—"

"Let's keep it a neutral 'he'."

"—maybe he forced old Godfrey to tell him the combination before sinking the knife into him."

"Even less likely. Everyone knew that Godfrey's paralysis included his speaking apparatus, which even in a good recovery is usually the last to come back, if it comes back at all. Certainly no one could bank on the old man's being able to talk suddenly. Did the killer order Godfrey to write the combination down, under threat of the knife? Even so, Godfrey would have been a fool to do it; his daughter not-

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withstanding, he seems to have been very far from a fool. He'd have known he was a goner the moment he wrote it.

"I'll admit," scowled Ellery, "that all these unlikelihoods don't make for exclusive conclusions. But they do accumulate a certain mass, and the weight of them convinces me that the killer put Mumford out of his misery simply to hurry up the inheritance of the pendant, not to steal it; that the killer then left, and Mumford wrote M-U-M on his own."

"You talk all-fired pretty," said Chief Newby with a grin. "There's only one thing."

"And that is?"

"If the killer didn't swipe the pendant, where is it?"

"That," Ellery nodded morosely, "is Bingo."

"I don't mean to high-hat my betters," twanged Newby, "but you have to admit you've got a tendency to bypass the obvious. All right, you hit on M-U-M as Godfrey's 13-21-13 safe combination. But why does that have to have anything to do with his reason for writing MUM on the pad? He was a bug on mums, so it was natural for him to use M-U-M as the combination. But he could have meant something entirely different when he wrote M-U-M on the pad. I still say he was fingering his murderer. And when you have a suspect around who's actually known as M-U-M, and called Mum, what more do you want?"

"Mum Caswell isn't the only obvious referent."

"Come again?"

Ellery's reasoning organ, needled by a phrase Newby had used, was busy with its embroidery.

"A bug on mums, you say. My point is, it's absolutely bizarre and incredible that MUM should have been his dying message. MUM is the symbol of the man who wrote it. He was a famous horticulturist specializing in mums. Everything about the man said MUM, from the flowers in his greenhouse to the oil paintings and prints and sculptures and intaglios and jewelry and Lord knows what else of them throughout the place. MUM was Mumford's trademark: a mum on his stationery, as I've taken the trouble to check; also on his wallet, and on his car, and in wrought iron over the front entrance. The moldings and doorknobs are all decorated with carved mums. And did you notice that his shirts sport an embroidered mum instead of his monogram? Also, if you'll pardon me, there's the irony of the knife that took his life, Godfrey's boyhood knife. How many times, allow me to wonder, did little Goddie Mumford play *mum*blety-peg with it?"

At this terminal extravagance—this spacecraft leap into whimsy—the Chief could not avoid a groan. Ellery rose, undismayed.

"It's that kind of case, Newby.

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And by the way, there's one line of investigation I haven't followed through yet. The search for that safe combination sidetracked me. I'll look into it tomorrow morning."

January 12 Having strained his prerogatives as a houseguest by arranging to borrow one of the Mumford cars, Ellery came downstairs the next morning before anyone else was up; and as he was passing the table in the foyer something caught his eye. There was a letter on the silver salver.

Being the world's nosiest nonnan, Mr. Q paused to look it over. The dime-store envelope was unstamped, unpostmarked, and addressed in a childishly disguised scrawl.

The envelope read: *To Ellery.*

He was surprised and delighted —surprised because the letter was so totally unexpected, delighted because he was in great need of a new point of inquiry. He tore open the envelope and removed from it a sheet of cheap notepaper.

The handwriting of the message was similarly disguised:

12/1/65

Mum's the word. If you tell what you know I'll kill you, too.

There was no signature.

Was this a new development? Hardly. All it did was obfuscate the mystification. The letter was from a not too uncommon type— the garrulous murderer; but what was he, Ellery, supposed to "know"? Whatever it was, he ardently wished he knew it.

He began to chew on the problem. After a while he began to look more cheerful. Obviously, his supposed knowledge was dangerous to the murderer. A yeast was therefore at work in the brew. Fear— the killer's fear—might produce a heady potion on which the killer would choke.

Ellery slipped the letter into his pocket and left the house.

He drove the station wagon to Connhaven, where he made for the Merrimac campus. Here he sought out the university museum. In the main office of the tomblike building he found waiting for him—he had telephoned ahead for the appointment—Wolcott Thorp.

"You have me all atwitter, Mr. Queen." The curator touched Ellery's hand with his papery paw. "And not entirely at ease. I assume you're working on poor Godfrey's murder. Why me?"

"You're a suspect," Ellery pointed out.

"Of course!" And Thorp hastened to add, "Aren't we all? If I'm acting guilty, it's human nature."

"That's the trouble, or one of them." Ellery smiled. "I'm familiar with the psychology of guilt by confrontation, even of the innocent. But that's not what I'm here for, so stop worrying. A museum to me is what the circus is to small boys. Do

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you have time to show me around yours?"

"Oh, yes!" Thorp began to beam.

"I'm curious about your particular field. It's West Africa, isn't it?"

The beam became sheer sunshine. "My friend," said Wolcott Thorp, "come with me! No, this way . . ."

For the next hour Ellery was the beneficiary of the man's genuine erudition. Ellery's interest was by no means simulated. He had a deep-rooted feeling for antiquity and anthropology (what was it but detection of a different kind?), and he was fascinated by the artifacts Thorp showed him from what had been western Sudan and the district of Kayes on the Senegal—idols and tutelary gods, fetishes, masks, charms, headdresses of pompons used by the Mandingos to ward off the powers of evil.

Happily inundated with information, Ellery finally interrupted the curator's flow long enough to ask for a sheet of paper on which to make notes. The curator obliged with a piece of museum stationery; and Ellery, preparing to notate, forced himself back from the dark tribalisms of Africa.

The inscription on the museum letterhead was arranged in two lines. The top line was simply the initials of the museum; the line below spelled out the full name: Merrimac University Museum.

The top line . . . MUM.

Thorp had excused himself for a moment; and folding the paper, clean of unnoted notes, Ellery took from his pocket the anonymous letter he had picked up from the salver that morning. He was about to insert the museum letterhead into the envelope when his attention was caught by the envelope's scrawled salutation.

To Ellery.

No, that was wrong!

To was correct enough, as he had read it, but not *Ellery*. The final letter had a long tail on it; this tail had been the cause of his mistaken reading. On re-examination the *ry* was not an *ry* at all; it was a straggle-tailed *n*.

To Ellen.

It was Ellen who knew something dangerous to the killer.

It was Ellen who was being threatened.

Wolcott Throp, returning, was astounded to see his visitor clap a hand to his head, jam a letter into his pocket, and dart out without so much as a fare-thee-well.

Crouched over the wheel of the station wagon, Ellery roared back to Wrightsville and the Mumford house, cursing every impediment that forced him to slacken speed. He left the car in the driveway and clattered past an alarmed Margaret Caswell and up the stairs in the longest leaps his long legs could manage.

He burst into Ellen's room.

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Ellen, propped up on a chaise longue by a picture window in some flowing garment that might have been designed for a painting by Gainsborough, was sipping hot chocolate from what could only have been—even in his agitation Ellery noticed it—a bone-china mustache cup.

"Am I supposed to be flattered, Mr. Queen," asked Ellen in a her-Ladyship-is-not-amused sort of voice, "by your boorish intrusion?"

"Beg pardon," panted Ellery. "I thought you might be dead."

Her Wedgwood eyes blued further. She set the antique cup down on an end table. "Did you say *dead?*"

He extended the anonymous letter. "Read this."

"What is it?"

"It's for you. I found it on the salver this morning and opened it by mistake, thinking it was addressed to me. I'm thankful I did. And you may be, too, before we're finished."

She took the letter and read it swiftly. The paper slipped from her hand, struck the edge of the chaise, and fluttered to the floor.

"What does it mean?" she whispered. "I don't understand."

"I think you do." Ellery stooped over her. "You know something dangerous to your father's murderer, and your father's murderer knows you know it. Ellen, tell me what it is, for the sake of your own safety. Think! What do you know that would explain a threat like this?"

He read in her eyes the immediate qualification of her terror. A slyness crept into them, and the lids slid halfway down.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"It's foolhardy of you to hold it back. We have a murderer on our hands and he's getting edgy. Tell me, Ellen."

"There's nothing to tell. I know nothing." She turned away. "Now will you please leave? I'm not exactly dressed for entertaining."

Ellery retrieved the note and left, damning all idiots. In addition to his other commitments he would now have to undertake the thankless task of acting as the woman's watchdog.

What was Ellen concealing?

Christopher, sighting the pale sun over the top of a pine, recited the opening lines of *Snowbound.*

"Whittier," he explained. "I still have a childish fondness for the old boy."

Joanne laughed, a sound of sleigh bells. "Delivered like a pro. Bravo."

"Not really. A pro gets fairly steady employment."

"You could, too, if you tried. Really tried."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"You know something? So do I. But only when I'm with you."

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"I'm glad."

"Enough to cleave to my bosom?"

"I don't quite know," said Joanne cautiously, "how to take that, Chris."

"Take it as an interim proposal. I don't want to tie you up in knots until I've made it all the way. You make me feel life-size, Jo. I suppose what I'm trying to say is that I need you."

Jo smiled, but inside. She slipped a little mittened hand into his glove, and they strolled toward the pines and the pale sun.

Wolcott Thorp came down from the university and Chief Newby drove over from headquarters after dinner, both at Ellery's invitation.

"What's up?" Newby asked Ellery, aside. "Have you come up with something?"

"Have you?" asked Ellery.

"Not a damn thing. I'm not the Wizard of Oz, the way you're supposed to be. No miracles yet?"

"No miracles, I'm afraid."

"Then what's cooking tonight?"

"A mess. I'm going to fling it at them, and see who runs for the mop—if any."

They joined the others in the drawing room.

"I've taken the liberty of asking Chief Newby to drop by," Ellery began, "because we need, I think, to redefine our position. Especially in reference to the dying message.

"When Chief Newby and I first found M-U-M on the scene, we made the natural assumption that Godfrey Mumford had left it as a clue to his killer's identity. Further thought compromised this theory, at least as far as I was concerned. The clue had so many possible interpretations that I shifted to the theory that it meant the safe combination. That worked out fine but accomplished nothing. I opened the safe, and the safe proved to be empty."

Ellery paused, seeming to wing far off. But his vision was in focus, and he could see nothing in their faces but attentiveness and bafflement.

"Now, after thinking it over again, I've changed my mind again," he went on. "If Godfrey had wanted to leave the combination, all he had to write down was 13-21-13. It would have been almost as easy to write as M-U-M, and there would have been no chance of its being misunderstood. So now I've gone back to the original theory, which Newby has never abandoned—namely, that the message points to the murderer's identity. If so, to whom?"

He paused again; and most of his captive audience waited in varying stages of nervousness for revelation.

"The Chief," said Ellery, with a side-glance at Mrs. Caswell, who alone seemed unmoved, "is convinced of that identity. And, of course, from a strictly logical point of view, it is certainly possible."

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"It is certainly *stuff*," said Mum; then pulled her head back in like a turtle.

"If it's stuff, Mrs. Caswell," smiled Ellery, "what's coming is pure moonshine. Yet—who knows? I'm not going to turn my back on a theory simply because it sounds like something out of Lewis Carroll. Bear with me.

"From the beginning this case has exhibited a remarkable series of what I have to call, for want of a more elegant term, 'doubles.'

"For example, there have been at least four 'doubles' connected with the murdered man: Godfrey had developed a famous chrysanthemum with a *double* blossom on one stem; the party he gave was to celebrate a *double* event, New Year's Eve and his seventieth birthday; his wall safe cost about *double* what it should have cost; and his children, Ellen and Christopher, are twins—another *double*.

"Further, let's not overlook the most significant *double* in the case: the double mystery of who killed Godfrey and what happened to the Imperial Pendant.

"What's more, we can go on through a great many more doubles. Because, if you interpret the dying message as a clue to the killer, each of you has at least two connections with MUM.

"For instance, Ellen." Ellen gave a visible start. "One, her maiden name was Mumford—first syllable, *Mum*. Second, she's married to an Egyptologist. Egyptology connotes pyramids, the Sphinx—and *mummies*."

Ellen reacted with a double sort of sound, like a jeer crossed with a neigh. "Rubbish! Nonsense!"

"It is, isn't it? Yet this thing gets curiouser and curiouser. Take Christopher. Again, the first syllable of *Mum*ford. And second, Chris, your profession."

"My profession?" asked Christopher, puzzled. "I'm an actor."

"And what are other words for actor? Player, performer, thespian, trouper . . . *mum*mer."

Christopher's handsome face reddened; he seemed torn between the impulse to laugh and the need to fume. As a compromise he simply threw up his hands.

Chief Newby was looking embarrassed. "Are you serious, Ellery?"

"Why, I don't know whether I am or not," said Ellery gravely. "I'm just trying it on for size. You're next, Mr. Thorp."

The elderly curator immediately looked frightened. "I? How do I fit in?"

"First, the initials of the museum as they appear on your stationery: Merrimac University Museum—M-U-M. Second, your special interest in the culture of West Africa and its artifacts: fetishes, masks, charms, talismans—oh, and pompons."

"I fail," said Thorp coldly, "to see the connection."

"The pompon is a variety of chry-

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santhe*mum*. And if you want still another cross-reference, Mr. Thorp, there's a phrase to describe your special field. Surely you know it?"

Here Thorp's erudition was apparently wanting. He shook his head.

"*Mum*bo jumbo," Ellery solemnly told him.

Thorp looked astonished. Then he chuckled. "How true. In fact, the very words come from the language of the Klassonke, a Mandingo tribe. What a quaint coincidence!"

"Yes," said Ellery; and the way he said it re-established the mood the museum man's laughter was shattering. "And Mrs. Caswell. I remind you again that Chief Newby has all along thought the dying message points to you. *Mum* Caswell."

Margaret Caswell's features took on the slightest pallor. "I hardly think this is the time to be playing games, Mr. Queen. But—all right, I'll play, too. You said that each of us has at least two connections with Godfrey's word on that pad. What's the other one of mine?"

Ellery's tone was positively apologetic. "I've noticed that you're fond of beer, Mrs. Caswell, particularly German beer. One of the best-known of the German beers is called *mum*."

And this at last brought Joanne to her feet, her little hands clenched. Her anger gave her a charming dimension.

"At first this was plain ridiculous," stormed Jo. "Now it's—it's criminally asinine! Are you purposely making fun of us? And if I may ask a silly question—and no doubt I'll get a pair of silly answers —what are *my* two connections with MUM?"

"There," mourned Ellery, "you have me, Jo. I haven't been able to spot one connection, let alone two."

"Quite amusing, I'm sure," Ellen said. "Meanwhile, we're neglecting the important thing. What happened to the pendant?"

All Christopher's dissatisfaction with the Queen performance burst out at finding a target he felt free to attack. "*Important* thing," he cried. "I can't make head or tail of what's going on here, but don't you consider it important to find out who killed father, Ellen? Aren't you concerned with anything but that damned pendant? You make me feel like a ghoul!"

"Don't flatter yourself," Ellen said to her twin. "You're nothing so impressive as a ghoul, Chris. What you are is a bloody ass."

He turned his back on his sister; and regal as a Borgia, she stalked from the room. From the stairway her complaint came to them distinctly: "You'd think father would have installed a lift instead of making us climb these antediluvian stairs."

"Yes, your Majesty!" yelled Christopher.

While Mr. Q murmured to Chief

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Newby, "Ellery in Blunderland. Through the Magnifying Glass . . ."

"What are you," snarled the Chief of Police, grabbing his coat and hat, "a nut or something?"

January 13 The one morning of the week when Ellen could be relied on to come down for breakfast was Sunday. Invariably she descended to a kipper and a slice of dry toast (except on communion days), after which, trailing High Church clouds of glory, she strode off to join her Anglican co-worshipers.

It was therefore a matter of remark that on this particular Sunday morning she failed to appear.

It was especially remarkable to Ellery, who had been barred by the proprieties from passing the night guarding her bedside. Enlisting Margaret Caswell's chaperonage, he rushed upstairs, kicked open the unlocked door, and dashed in.

Ellen was still in bed. He listened frantically to her breathing; he took her pulse; he shook her, shouting in her ear. Then he damned her perversity and the unlocked door, which was an example of it.

"Phone Conk Farnham!" he bellowed at Mrs. Caswell.

There followed a scene of chaos, not without its absurdity, like an old Mack Sennett comedy. Its climax came when, for the umpteenth time in ten days, Dr. Farnham arrived on the run with his little black bag. It was surely Conk's opinion, thought Ellery, that he was hopelessly trapped in the antics of a houseful of lunatics.

"Sleeping pills," the doctor said. "Slight overdose. No need for treatment; she didn't take enough. She'll come out of it by herself soon —in fact, she's coming out of it now."

"This must be it on the night table," Ellery mumbled.

"What?"

"The medium of the pills."

A cup of scummy cold chocolate sat there, almost full.

"That's it, all right," said Dr. Farnham, after tasting it. "It's loaded. If she'd swallowed the whole cupful, Ellery, she'd have been done for."

"When will she be able to talk?"

"As soon as she's all the way out."

Ellery snapped his fingers. "Excuse me, Conk!" he said, and dashed past Mrs. Caswell and tore down the stairs. In the breakfast room, silent and glum, sat Jo and Chris and Wolcott Thorp.

"How's Ellen?" Chris asked, half rising.

"Sit down. She's all right. This time. Now we can start worrying about next time."

"Next time?"

"Somebody slipped a lethal overdose of sleeping pills in her hot chocolate before she went to bed last night—unless you're prepared to argue that Ellen is the type who would attempt suicide, which in

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my book she definitely is not. Anyway, she took only a few sips, thereby surviving. But whoever tried to kill her may try another time, and my guess is the time will be sooner than later. So let's not dawdle. Who knows who prepared the hot chocolate last night?"

"I do," said Joanne. "She prepared it herself. I was in the kitchen with her."

"All the time she was fixing it?"

"No, I left before she did."

"Anyone else in the kitchen at the time, or near it?"

"Not I," said Christopher promptly, wiping his brow, which for some reason was damp. "If I ever give way to one of my homicidal impulses toward Ellen, I'll use something sure, like cyanide."

But no one smiled.

"You, Mr. Thorp?" asked Ellery, fixing the curator with a glittering eye.

"Not I," said the little man, stuttering.

"Had anyone gone up to bed?"

"I don't think so," said Jo, her eyes worried. "No, I'm sure no one had. It was just after we finished that crazy farce of yours in the drawing room—when Ellen pranced out, I mean. A few minutes later she came downstairs again to prepare her chocolate. All the rest of us were still here. Don't you remember?"

"No, because I was seeing Chief Newby out, and we talked outside for a few minutes before he drove off. Unfortunately I share the general weakness of being unable to be in two places at the same time. Did Ellen go directly upstairs with her chocolate?"

"I can answer that," said Christopher. "I'd gone to the library to lick my wounds, and Ellen came in for a book to read in bed, she said. She wasn't there more than two or three minutes. She took one of yours, if I'm not mistaken."

"Maybe that's why she fell asleep so soon," said Jo with a little snap-crackle-pop in her voice.

"Even that," said Ellery with a bow, "is not impossible. In any event, she must have left her cup standing in the kitchen for those two or three minutes."

"I guess so," said Christopher. "It would also seem that we were all milling around, with opportunity to dodge into the kitchen and tamper with it, allowing for a healthy lie or two. Take your pick, Mr. Queen. In my own defense I can only say I didn't do it."

"Nor," stuttered little Wolcott Thorp, "did I."

"It looks," said Jo, "as if you'll have to make the most of what you have."

"Which," snapped Ellery, "is precious little."

And he left them to go back upstairs, where he found Dr. Farnham preparing to depart. Ellen was awake, propped up against the headboard, looking not hung over

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at all. What she did look like was hostile and furtive.

Ellery went to work.

But his most tried techniques, running from the sympathetic plea to the horrendous warning, failed to budge her. Her brush with death seemed to have left her only the more doggedly crouched over whatever secret she was concealing.

The most Ellery could pry out of her was the admission that she had bought sleeping pills herself from a local "chemist," on the prescription of another doctor in town whom she did not name. Finally, slipping down in the bed, she turned her face to the wall and refused to answer any more of his questions whatsoever.

Checkmated, Ellery withdrew, leaving Mrs. Caswell on guard.

Someone else, he thought, was at the moment sharing his frustration. The agent of the sleeping pills.

The dinner conversation had gaps. Ellery pushed the food around on his plate. Ellen attempted a show of Empire fortitude, but the attempt was sorry, and he suspected that she had come down to the dinner table only because of the creepy isolation of her bedroom.

Margaret Caswell sat in a tense posture that suggested listening, as for the baying of bloodhounds. Christopher and Joanne sought reassurance in eloquent eye examination of each other. Wolcott Thorp tried to stimulate a discussion of some recent Fulah acquisitions by the museum, but no one listened even politely, and he too fell under the spell of the pervasive gloom.

They were about to leave the dinner table when the doorbell rang with an angry chime. Ellery leaped to life.

"Chief Newby," he said. "I'll let him in, if no one minds. Please go to the drawing room—all of you. We're going to get on with this lethal nonsense and make something of it if it takes all night."

He hurried to the front door. Newby hurled his hat and overcoat on a tapestried chair but pointedly failed to remove his overshoes, as if announcing that at the first sound of jabberwocky he intended to exit.

They joined the others in the drawing room, and Newby said, "All right, Ellery, get on with it."

"Let's begin," Ellery said, "with a fact. The fact that you, Ellen, are in imminent danger. What we don't know, and must know, is why. It's something only you can tell us, and I suggest you do so before it's too late. I remind you that the murderer of your father is here in this room, listening and watching."

Four pairs of eyes shifted from Ellen immediately, but they came right back again.

Ellen's lips remained drawn down at the corners, like a scar. "I

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told you—I don't know what you're talking about."

"You're afraid, of course. But do you think you're going to buy immunity with silence? A murderer needs to sleep at night, too, and his best assurance of peace of mind is your permanent removal. So talk while you still can."

"It's my job to warn you, Mrs. Nash," Chief Newby put in sourly, "that if you're holding back evidence, you're committing a crime. How much trouble do you want to be in?"

But Ellen fixed her eyes on the fists in her lap.

"All right," said Ellery, and his tone was so odd that even Ellen stirred. "If you won't talk, I will.

"Let's start all over again. What did Godfrey mean by writing M-U-M? Ignore what I've said before about it. I've now come to a final conclusion.

"A man clear-headed enough to leave a dying message is clear-headed enough to avoid ambiguity. Since MUM involved most of you—and in more ways than one, far-fetched as most of them are—then I have to conclude that Godfrey did not intend MUM to indicate the identity of his murderer.

"Consequently, once more I have to go back to what Godfrey did promise to leave you—the combination of his safe."

"But you went through all that," exploded Newby. "And it washed out—the safe was empty."

"Not a complete washout, Newby. I translated MUM into numbers because of the twenty-six numbers on the dial, and that proved correct as far as it went. But what if it didn't go far enough? Remember the doubles? One was that the safe cost Godfrey about double what it should have. *What if there was a good, solid, practical reason for that double cost?* Suppose there's more to that safe than meets the eye—*some feature that cost the extra money.* Double cost . . . *how about double safe?*"

That brought their mouths open, and he continued swiftly. "If it was a double safe, there would be *two* combinations. One would work by the numbers 13-21-13, as it does, and would open the orthodox safe. The other combination would open another safe!—which obviously must be contained *within* the safe, making an inner, smaller safe. And suppose—since that's the word Godfrey wrote down just before he died—suppose that not only is MUM the combination for the outer safe, but MUM is also the combination for the inner safe One MUM translating into numbers, the second remaining exactly what it is—*a word of three letters.*"

"But there aren't any letters on the dial," protested Newby.

"Right. But remember what's etched on the rim of the knob? The name and address of the manufacturer: VULCAN SAFE & LOCK COMPANY, INC., NEW HAVEN, CONN. And

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you'll note that, contained in those words, are an M and a U!

"Shall we try it?"

Ellery went over to the oil painting and slid it to one side. He revolved the dial a few times, then turned it until the M of COMPANY lay directly under the alignment notch; then he turned right to the U of VULCAN, aligning that, then left, back to the M of COMPANY.

He pulled on the knob.

The safe door did not swing open. Instead, the knob came out in his hand! And behind the knob, within the thickness of the safe door, where the tumblers and mechanism lay, appeared a small compartment—a safe within a safe. And in the compartment, flashing like a minor sun surrounded by sixteen glowing planets, was the Imperial Pendant.

"Alagazam," Ellery said softly, holding it aloft so that the light from the old-fashioned crystal chandelier blazed from the pendant in a thousand coruscations. "When Mr. Mumford put the necklace away, his back must have been to you, and it was a broad back. It was into the knob-safe that he put this, not into the regular one. That's why he probably never bothered to put the pendant in a bank vault, Christopher. Even if someone tried to burgle this safe, could he dream that the real safe was behind the knob? It was, if you'll excuse the pun, very safe indeed. Here, Newby, I imagine you'd better take charge of this until the will is probated and certain other matters are cleared up."

And Ellery tossed the pendant to Newby, while the others' heads moved in unison, like the heads of spectators at a tennis match.

"Q.E.D.," said Ellery. "One half of our mystery is solved. It remains only to solve the other half.

"Who killed Godfrey Mumford?"

He faced them with such fierceness that they all shrank back.

"I've known since yesterday morning who the murderer is," Ellery said. "There wasn't a chance, by the way, that he'd take off—not so long as the pendant was missing. It was the finding of the pendant that was holding me up, too.

"I want you all to look at this letter from the murderer to Ellen. Examine it carefully."

He took it from his pocket and handed it to Chief Newby, who looked it over, scowled, and passed it on.

12/1/65

Mum's the word. If you tell what you know I'll kill you, too.

When it came back to him from Thorp, the last to read it, Ellery could detect nothing but blankness on any face.

"You don't see it?"

"Come on, Ellery," Newby rasped. "So I'm as blind as the rest and you've got the eyes of a chicken hawk. What's the point?"

"The point is the date."

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"The date?"

"The date at the top. *12/1/65.*"

"Why, that's wrong," said Jo suddenly. "It's January, not December."

"Correct. The letter was left on the salver the morning of January twelfth—*1/12/65.* The writer reversed the numerals for the month and day. Why? In the United States we write the month numeral first, always, *then* the day numeral. *It's in England that they do it the opposite way.*

"Who in this household has been living in England for years? Who uses the Anglicism 'trunk call' for 'long distance'? Who says 'lift' for 'elevator,' 'Chief Constable' for 'Chief of Police', 'chemist' instead of 'druggist' or 'pharmacist'?

"Ellen, of course. Ellen, who wrote this 'threatening' letter to herself."

Ellen was glaring at Ellery as if he had turned into a monster from outer space. "No! I didn't!"

But Ellery ignored her. "And why should Ellen have written a threatening letter to herself? Well, what was the effect the letter produced? It made her look as though she were next in line to be murdered—by implication, therefore, innocent of the killing of Godfrey.

"This was doubly indicated by the clumsy poisoning attempt on herself—an evident phony. She never meant to drink more than a few sips. The whole hot chocolate episode was designed to make that 'threat' look good."

Now his eyes found Ellen's and locked.

"Why should you want to make yourself look innocent, Ellen? The innocent don't have to *make* themselves look innocent. Only the guilty—"

"Are you accusing *me*?" Ellen shrieked. "Of stabbing my own father to death?" She looked about wildly. "Chris, Jo—you can't believe —*Mum*!"

But Ellery drove ahead without mercy. "The clue points directly to you, Ellen, and only to you. Of course, if you've anything to say that puts a different complexion on all this, I advise you to say it now."

Ellery kept her gaze pinned down like a butterfly specimen. She began to tremble. And as she did so, he suddenly said in the kindest of voices, "Don't be afraid any more, Ellen. You see, I know what you know. All I want you to do is to speak out, to tell us what you know."

And she did, her story rushing out. "I was up the night father was murdered—couldn't sleep for some reason. It was long past midnight. While I was in the upstairs hall, on my way down to the kitchen for a snack . . . I happened to see somebody sneak out of father's room. I was sure he saw me. I was afraid to tell . . ."

"And who was it you saw, Ellen?"

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"It was . . . it was . . ." And her arm shot out—". . . it was Wolcott Thorp!"

Ellery went early to his room, packed his suitcases, and slipped like the Arab silently away, leaving behind a bread-and-butter note. He did not check back in to the Hollis, the savor having gone out of Wrightsville; but he had a couple of hours to kill before plane time, and he killed them, appropriately, at police headquarters.

"Ellery!" Chief Newby greeted him, rising and seizing his hand. "I was hoping you'd drop in. I never did get to thank you properly. That was a slick scene you put on last night. You told a real whopper."

"I may have told," said Ellery soberly, "several."

"You said you knew what Ellen knew."

"Oh, that. Yes, of course. But I had to get her to talk; I was reasonably certain that was what she was holding back. And that letter business—"

"Did you really think she wrote that letter?"

"Not for a moment. Except for psychos, murderers don't admit their killings—even in disguised handwritings—at a time when they're not even suspected. And Ellen's Britishness was so blatant that anyone could have used the British dating system to frame her. So although I knew she hadn't written that threatening letter to herself, I accused her of it last night to frighten her into putting the finger on Thorp.

"Thorp, of course, was the one who wrote the letter. He counted on my spotting the Anglicism and pinning it on Ellen for the reason I gave—that double whammy about if-she-wants-us-to-think-she's innocent-she-must-be-guilty. And if I hadn't spotted it, he could always have called it to my attention.

"It may even be that Thorp originally designed the frame-up letter to be used by him in the event Ellen did talk and accused him of what she'd seen. The trouble was, even when Ellen kept her mouth shut, Thorp had second thoughts. That poisoned chocolate business wasn't an attempt on Ellen's part to make herself look innocent, as I mendaciously suggested last night in putting the pressure on her; it was a genuine attempt by Thorp to shut her mouth before she could open it. He expected us—if it had succeeded—to accept it as a suicide-confession."

"Incidentally," said the Chief, "you said you knew it was Thorp—"

"A slight exaggeration. I had reason to suspect Thorp, but I had no proof—not an iota; and I was afraid another attack on Ellen might succeed."

"But why," asked the Chief, "would a man like Thorp murder his best friend in cold blood? He's

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confessed to the killing, but we haven't been able to get a word out of him about motive. It certainly can't be that measly twenty thousand Godfrey was leaving him."

Ellery sighed. "The collector breed are a strange lot, Newby. In spite of what he told Godfrey, Thorp probably didn't consider himself too old to go on that expedition to West Africa; he must have been waiting desperately for years for what he thought was going to be a hundred thousand dollars to finance the trip. When he learned that Godfrey's carelessness had caused it to shrink to only one-fifth of that, he flipped. That expedition was the dream of his life. Is there anyone we can come to hate more than the loved one who disappoints and frustrates us?"

Newby held up his hand as Ellery rose. "Wait a minute! What made you suspect Thorp in the first place? It must be something fancy I missed."

Ellery did not display pride. His Wrightsville triumphs too often felt like defeats. Perhaps it was because he loved the old town, and it had been his lot to clean up her filth.

"Nothing fancy, Newby. The dreariest kind of slip on Thorp's part. When you and I first went to the house, they told us in detail what had gone on at the discovery of the body. The line of previous action was very clear. Margaret Caswell rushed out of Godfrey's bedroom, crying out that the old man was—mark the word—*dead*. They all rushed upstairs except Thorp, who went to the downstairs phone, called Dr. Farnham, then called you here at headquarters. And what did Thorp tell you? That Mumford had been found, not merely dead, but *murdered*. Why should Thorp have leaped to the conclusion that the old man's death was unnatural *unless he already knew it*?

"You know, Newby," Ellery said with a half smile that apologized in advance, "Wolcott Thorp would have been far, far better off if he'd followed his own advice and—forgive me—kept mum."

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"Saki," the pseudonym of H. H. Munro, was born in Burma, raised in Devonshire, and in his late teens was taken by his father to France, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. In his early twenties he served a stint with the Burma police, and then went to London to write. He earned a living as a newspaperman, writing political sketches, and was a foreign correspondent in the Balkans, Russia, and Paris. In his late thirties he returned to London, this time to write seriously—after his own fashion. When World War I exploded in Europe, he enlisted and proved himself an excellent soldier. He was killed in action in 1916.

His chief traits were his whimsicality, sense of humor, love of animals, Highland pride, and indifference to money. In his humorous writing he could be both flippant and deeply satirical; he became famous for his tales of sheer horror. He chose his pen-name from Omar Khayyám, and Christopher Morley once wrote of him: "The empty glass we turn down for him is the fragile, hollow-stemmed goblet meant for the dryest champagne; it is of the finest."

Here is a Saki story about dusk—"the hour of the defeated." It was one of Christopher Morley's favorite Saki tales . . .

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

by SAKI (H. H. Munro)

NORMAN GORTSBY SAT ON A bench in the Park, with his back to a strip of bush-planted sward, fenced by the park railings, and the Row fronting him across a wide stretch of carriage drive. Hyde Park Corner, with its rattle and hoot of traffic, lay immediately to his right.

It was some thirty minutes past six on an early March evening, and dusk had fallen heavily over the scene—dusk mitigated by some faint moonlight and many street lamps. There was a wide emptiness over road and sidewalk, and yet there were many unconsidered figures moving silently through the half light or dotted unobtrusively on bench and chair, scarcely to be distinguished from the shadowed gloom in which they sat.

The scene pleased Gortsby and harmonized with his present mood. Dusk, to his mind, was the hour of the defeated. Men and women,

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who had fought and lost, who hid their fallen fortunes and dead hopes as far as possible from the scrutiny of the curious, came forth in this hour of gloaming, when their shabby clothes and bowed shoulders and unhappy eyes might pass unnoticed, or, at any rate, unrecognized.

A king that is conquered must see strange looks,
So bitter a thing is the heart of man.

The wanderers in the dusk did not choose to have strange looks fasten on them, therefore they came out in this bat-fashion, taking their pleasure sadly in a pleasure-ground that had emptied of its rightful occupants. Beyond the sheltering screen of bushes and palings came a realm of brilliant lights and noisy, rushing traffic. A blazing, many-tiered stretch of windows shone through the dusk and almost dispersed it, marking the haunts of those other people, who held their own in life's struggle, or at any rate had not had to admit failure.

So Gortsby's imagination pictured things as he sat on his bench in the almost deserted walk. He was in the mood to count himself among the defeated. Money troubles did not press on him; had he so wished he could have strolled into the thoroughfares of light and noise, and taken his place among the jostling ranks of those who enjoyed prosperity or struggled for it.

He had failed in a more subtle ambition, and for the moment he was heart-sore and disillusioned, and not disinclined to take a certain cynical pleasure in observing and labelling his fellow wanderers as they went their ways in the dark stretches between the lamplights.

On the bench by his side sat an elderly gentleman with a drooping air of defiance that was probably the remaining vestige of self-respect in an individual who had ceased to defy successfully anybody or anything. His clothes could scarcely be called shabby—at least they passed muster in the half light—but one's imagination could not have pictured the wearer embarking on the purchase of a half-crown box of chocolates or laying out ninepence for a carnation buttonhole.

He belonged unmistakably to that forlorn orchestra to whose piping no one dances; he was one of the world's lamenters who induces no responsive weeping. As he rose to go, Gortsby imagined him returning to a home circle where he was snubbed and of no account, or to some bleak lodging where his ability to pay a weekly bill was the beginning and end of the interest he inspired.

His retreating figure vanished slowly into the shadows, and his place on the bench was taken almost immediately by a young man, fairly well dressed but scarcely more cheerful of mien than his predecessor. As if to emphasize the fact that the world went badly with

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him, the newcomer unburdened himself of an angry and very audible expletive as he flung himself into the seat.

"You don't seem in a very good temper," said Gortsby, judging that he was expected to take due notice of the demonstration.

The young man turned to him with a look of disarming frankness which put Gortsby instantly on his guard.

"You wouldn't be in a good temper if you were in the fix I'm in," the young man said. "I've done the silliest thing I've ever done in my life."

"Yes?" said Gortsby dispassionately.

"Came up this afternoon, meaning to stay at the Patagonian Hotel in Berkshire Square," continued the young man. "When I got there I found it had been pulled down some weeks ago and a cinema theatre run up on the site. The taxi driver recommended me to another hotel some way off and I went there. I just sent a letter to my people, giving them the address, and then I went out to buy some soap—I'd forgotten to pack any and I hate using hotel soap.

"Then I strolled about a bit, had a drink at a bar and looked at the shops, and when I came to turn my steps back to the hotel I suddenly realized that I didn't remember its name or even what street it was on. There's a nice predicament for a fellow who hasn't any friends or connections in London!

"Of course, I can wire to my people for the address, but they won't get my letter till tomorrow; meantime, I'm without any money, came out with a couple of shillings on me, which went in buying the soap and getting the drink, and here I am, wandering about with twopence in my pocket and nowhere to go for the night."

There was an eloquent pause after the story had been told.

"I suppose you think I've spun you rather an impossible yarn," said the young man presently, with a suggestion of resentment in his voice.

"Not at all impossible," said Gortsby judicially. "I remember doing exactly the same thing once in a foreign capital, and on that occasion there were two of us, which made it more remarkable. Luckily, we remembered that the hotel was on a sort of canal, and when we struck the canal we were able to find our way back to the hotel."

The youth brightened at the reminiscence. "In a foreign city I wouldn't mind so much," he said. "One could go to one's Consul and get the requisite help from him. Here in one's own land one is far more derelict if one gets into a fix. Unless I can find some decent chap to swallow my story and lend me some money, I seem likely to spend the night on the Embankment. I'm glad, anyhow, that you don't think

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the story outrageously improbable."

He threw a good deal of warmth into the last remark, as though perhaps to indicate his hope that Gortsby did not fall far short of the requisite decency.

"Of course," said Gortsby slowly, "the weak point of your story is that you can't produce the soap."

The young man sat forward hurriedly, felt rapidly in the pockets of his overcoat, and then jumped to his feet.

"I must have lost it," he muttered angrily.

"To lose a hotel and a cake of soap on one afternoon suggests willful carelessness," said Gortsby, but the young man scarcely waited to hear the end of the remark. He flitted away down the path, his head held high, with an air of somewhat jaded jauntiness.

"It was a pity," mused Gortsby. "The going out to get one's own soap was the one convincing touch in the whole story, and yet it was just that little detail that brought him to grief. If he had had the brilliant forethought to provide himself with a cake of soap, wrapped and sealed with all the solicitude of the chemist's counter, he would have been a genius in his particular line. In his particular line genius certainly consists of an infinite capacity for taking precautions."

With that reflection Gortsby rose to go; as he did so an exclamation of concern escaped him. Lying on the ground by the side of the bench was a small oval packet, wrapped and sealed with the solicitude of a chemist's counter. It could be nothing else but a cake of soap, and it had evidently fallen out of the youth's overcoat pocket when he flung himself down onto the seat.

In another moment Gortsby was scudding along the dusk-shrouded path in anxious quest for a youthful figure in a light overcoat. He had nearly given up the search when he caught sight of the object of his pursuit standing irresolutely on the border of the carriage drive, evidently uncertain whether to strike out across the Park or make for the bustling pavements of Knightsbridge.

He turned round sharply with an air of defensive hostility when he found Gortsby hailing him.

"The important witness to the genuineness of your story has turned up," said Gortsby, holding out the cake of soap. "It must have slid out of your overcoat pocket when you sat down on the seat. I saw it on the ground after you left. You must excuse my disbelief, but appearances were really rather against you, and now, as I appealed to the testimony of the soap I think I ought to abide by its verdict. If the loan of a sovereign is any good to you—"

The young man hastily removed all doubt on the subject by pocketing the coin.

"Here is my card with my address," continued Gortsby. "Any

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day this week will do for returning the money, and here is the soap—don't lose it again; it's been a good friend to you."

"Lucky thing your finding it," said the youth, and then, with a catch in his voice, he blurted out a word or two of thanks and fled headlong in the direction of Knightsbridge.

"Poor boy, he nearly broke down," said Gortsby to himself. "I don't wonder either; the relief from his quandary must have been acute. It's a lesson to me not to be too clever in judging only by circumstantial evidence."

As Gortsby retraced his steps past the seat where the little drama had taken place he saw an elderly gentleman poking and peering beneath it and on all sides of it, and recognized his earlier fellow occupant.

"Have you lost anything, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, a cake of soap."

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We certainly look forward to another deeply chuckling and gently ironic story by Mr. Powell . . .

THE FRIENDS OF HECTOR JOUVET

by JAMES POWELL

THE OLD MAN CAME UP THE PATH that sloped between the benches and flowerbeds, but he stopped short of the edge of the cliff where Brown stood waiting. Instead, he sat down on a bench a few yards away, drew a folded newspaper from his coat pocket, and began to read.

Brown hesitated. His French wasn't really that good and for a moment he couldn't think of the verb "to follow." When he remembered, his chin started to tremble, and throwing his cigarette over the edge he went up to the old man.

"Why are you following me? Is it good to follow people? I do not like being followed. Do you like being followed?" These were all the forms of the verb Brown could muster and rather than start over again, he stopped.

The old man, who had been listening attentively, slipped the newspaper back in his pocket and smiled. "I am afraid you are mistaken, young man. I am not following you." His English was meticulous and the quiet conviction of his words told Brown it was the truth.

"Oh," said Brown, and stepped back in confusion.

"Actually," said the old man, as if to cover the other's embarrassment, "I come here quite often. The sea is blue; the rocks are white. I have always thought that this would be the ideal place for a visitor like yourself to see our gay, care-

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free little principality for the first time. Regrettably that is impossible, for to come upon this prospect first, one would have to scale the cliff."

"Maybe a good place to see San Sebastiano for the last time, then," said Brown with a half smile.

"Ah, you are leaving us?" asked the old man sadly. "Well, I hope you have seen more of our happy, light-hearted city than the inside of the Casino."

"I guess that was about as far as I got," admitted Brown.

"But that is terrible, terrible," said the old man, throwing up his hands in mock horror. "But all is not lost and if you will permit me I can still point out a few highlights from here."

He led Brown back to the edge of the cliff. "Below us, of course, is the harbor and over there, the romantic old quarter. Its reputation is exaggerated, I assure you. Our women are not promiscuous; songs have been written about that. On the left you have our celebrated Reptile Museum founded by Prince Adalbert, an ardent herpetologist and the grandfather of our present prince. My father had many stories of the misadventures of the good Prince Adalbert who prowled the streets of San Sebastiano at all hours hunting snakes with his forked stick, returning the salutes of the policemen and chatting quietly to himself.

"And there, behind the Cathedral, you can see the roof of the Casino into which, you are perhaps aware, the citizens of the principality are not allowed to enter. That is quite appropriate. A good host does not laugh at his own jokes."

Brown took a wrist watch out of his pocket, looked at it, and put it back.

"Am I keeping you? I hope not," said the old man. "Actually I cannot stay much longer myself. I must see a friend off on the train—the 4:45."

"You don't have much time," warned Brown.

"Enough for a bit more of our history," said the old man, leading Brown back to the bench. "Were you aware, for example, that our mineral waters were held in high esteem as early as the days of the Romans? One might wonder why, since it is quite sulphurous and abominable. Perhaps they had more horrible diseases in classical times than we do today.

"Within the memory of my grandfather, the elderly and infirm flocked to San Sebastiano to take our waters. They sat on park benches and scowled at our pigeons; they let themselves be pushed along our promenades in wicker chairs; they pulled wry faces and sucked at our mineral waters. But we were more than a spa. We were renowned for personal sobriety and dignified compassion toward those who frequented our life-giving waters.

"Yes, believe it or not, the gay,

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carefree people of today's San Sebastiano were all that. In the generation preceding the Franco-Prussian War acute depression of the liver was fashionable and our waters were highly recommended. Those were the fat years for us, years of building, and as it later turned out, of overbuilding. For with the close of the War an epidemic of disorders of the spleen swept across France and non-Germanic Europe. Less carbonated waters came into style and almost overnight our little city was as deserted and forlorn as an overgrown cemetery. Today one is at the top, tomorrow at the bottom."

Brown's mouth worked soundlessly. Then he said, "Life is a real double-crosser."

"Why, that is quite philosophical for someone so young, and an American at that," smiled the old man.

"Canadian," said Brown.

"A Canadian, how delightful," said the old man still smiling.

"You're going to miss your train," said Brown.

"I still have a bit more time," said the old man. "Now let me see. Where were we? Ah, yes. Now, as it happened, a modest, unassuming little Casino had been established on an out-of-the-way street to accommodate the younger, faster set which frequented our little principality at the height of its popularity. A mere accommodation—"

Suddenly the old man clapped a hand to his forehead. "I have just thought of something I should have thought of before," he said. "Perhaps you can help me. The Canadian and the American dollar are worth the same, are they not?"

Brown stared at him for a moment. "No," he said finally.

"Then the Canadian dollar is worth more?" said the old man.

"Less," said Brown.

"Ah, I am sorry," said the old man. "Forgive me for dwelling on it but would you happen to know the exact—"

"The Canadian dollar is worth between 92 and 93 cents," said the young man.

"Let us say 93," insisted the old man graciously. He pursed his lips and calculated. "Fine. Fine," he said. "I have just had what you would call a false alarm. But let us get back to what we were talking about. Imagine the city fathers' surprise when at the very time the attraction of our waters declined, the revenue from the Casino showed a healthy increase, due, in part, to our abundance of economical hotels and hungry waiters.

"It soon became obvious that San Sebastiano was at a crossroads. Should we wait, sober, compassionate, with tightened belts for the prodigal elderly and infirm to return? Or should we cut a new path through the history of San Sebastiano, expand the Casino, become gay, hurdy-gurdy, and carefree?

"It was decided to have a referen-

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dum. Feelings ran high. A man walking down the street laughs with pure delight at some enchanting thing his daughter, a child of five, had said. He is jumped upon and severely beaten by a group of mineral-water supporters who believed him to be demonstrating in favor of the Casino. A crowd of Casino supporters, returning in an ugly mood from a mass rally, come upon a funeral procession in the street and interpret it as a counter-demonstration by the mineral-water faction. The ensuing clash provoked three solid days of rioting. *Et cetera. Et cetera.* The outcome of the referendum you know, for it is as you see us now."

"You know, you've missed your friend's train," said Brown.

"Why, then I'll see him off on the next," said the old man. "As I was about to say, San Sebastiano with its expanded gambling facilities entered what has been described as its 'laughing years.' In 1909 an entirely new Casino, constructed in the style of the Ottoman Turk, was opened amid fireworks, balloon ascents, and a magnificent sailboat regatta.

"On the opening day Casimir Vaugirard in his tri-wing Prentis-Jenkins Hedgehog flew from Perpignan to San Sebastiano in a matter of hours. He circled the dome and minaret of the Casino dropping projectiles trailing the colors of the Vaugirards and San Sebastiano, then dipped his wings in a majestic salute to the cheering crowd and crashed into the side of this very hill.

"What might have spelled disaster for us—since tragedy was hardly the mood we hoped to associate with our little principality—became instead a supreme gesture of love when, in the cockpit, his body was found locked in the embrace of his mistress, the celebrated beauty known as Lola.

"Well, missing one train is no excuse for missing the next," said the old man, "and a few formalities still remain. I trust what I have said will enable you to appreciate what is about to happen."

"Formalities?" said Brown.

"May I see your passport?" said the old man. Brown stared at the outstretched hand. Nodding toward it, the old man said, "I am the police, you see. Your passport, please." Brown handed it over.

The old man skimmed down the vital statistics, shook his head sympathetically over the photograph, then thumbed through the pages, turning the passport this way and that to read the frontier stamps.

"But I haven't done anything wrong," said Brown.

The old man shrugged genially and without pausing in his examination of the passport, drew an envelope from his pocket and passed it to the young man.

"Mr. Brown, here you will find one second-class railway ticket, San Sebastiano to Paris, and banknotes

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to the sum of fifty new francs—ten of your dollars, more or less. I would appreciate your checking to see that this is exactly as I say, for I am required to ask you to sign a receipt."

In the midst of counting the bills, Brown stopped. "But this is crazy. I haven't done anything."

The old man closed the passport and handed it back. "Mr. Brown, let me say directly what both you and I know: your coming here this afternoon was for the purpose of doing away with yourself."

"A lie—an out-and-out lie," said Brown indignantly.

"No, it is not," said the old man calmly. "You are not being honest with me."

"Honest?" shouted Brown. "You're a fine one to talk about honesty. Didn't I ask you if you were following me and didn't you say"—he switched into a falsetto—"'I am afraid you are mistaken, young man'?"

"You are not being quite fair, Mr. Brown. Granted I did walk behind you from the Casino. But I was not following you. Except for my superiors' primitive attitude regarding expenses, I could have come by taxi and arrived here well ahead of you."

The old man shrugged at Brown's look of disbelief. "Mr. Brown," he said, "have you ever considered the possibilities of suicide open to a tourist? He does not have a gun—his intention in coming abroad is rarely to shoot himself. Our pharmacies confuse him and he does not know the name in our language for the poison he might have used with every confidence at home. He distrusts our hotel furniture, and rightly so. Will a chair that looks as though Louis XIV sat in it hold his weight as he ties a rope to the chandelier? And in what store would he buy the rope?

"No, if you think about it, Mr. Brown, there is only one way—to throw oneself from a high place. Here in San Sebastiano there is really only one spot high enough to do the job without risking half measures. And here we are."

"Look," said Brown with a facsimile of laughter, "you've really made a mistake. I came here to try my luck at the Casino and now I'm off to Florence or some place. I'm making a kind of grand tour." The old man smiled patiently. "Look," said Brown, "the whole trip is a reward for my graduating in dentistry from McGill University—that's in Montreal. When the trip's over I go back home to Drumheller, Alberta, and go into practice with my father. A guy with his future all cut out for him would be the last person to commit suicide. What I mean is, you don't have any motive."

The old man sighed and took a notebook from his pocket. "'On August 15 last,'" he read, "'the Eighth Bureau of the Judiciary Police'"—he half rose and tipped his

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hat—" 'was alerted by the local American Express office that one Brown, Norman, had that day cashed in the return portion of a first-class airplane ticket, Paris-Montreal-Calgary. Subsequent routine investigation revealed that on the preceding day the subject had checked into the Hotel de l'Avenir and the same afternoon at the Casino had lost chips amounting to $520.

" 'The afternoon following the subject's visit to American Express he lost chips amounting to $450. That evening he sent the following cablegram to a Miss Annabella Brown, Drumheller, Alberta: DEAR AUNT BELLA, MONEY AND RETURN TICKET LOST IN FIRE THAT DESTROYED MY HOTEL. BEST NOT TO WORRY NORMAN SENIOR. $1000 SHOULD COVER IT NICELY. NORMY.

" 'August 16, subject loses chips amounting to $1000.' Miss Brown is very prompt. 'Subject leaves Casino and walks to the Parc de la Grande Armée'—which is where we are now—'and stands in contemplation at edge of cliff, then leaves park and sends following cablegram: DEAR AUNT BELLA, HOTEL FIRE NO ACCIDENT. HAVE STUMBLED ON VAST INTERNATIONAL PLOT LINKING JAPANESE BEETLES, DISAPPEARANCE OF AMELIA EARHART, AND RADICAL CHANGES IN WEATHER THESE LAST FEW YEARS. CONFIRMS YOUR SUSPICION, WAS NOT SUNSPOTS. HAVE CONTACTED DISILLUSIONED FOREIGN AGENT. NEED $5000 AS PROOF OF MY GOOD FAITH. LET'S KEEP THIS TO OURSELVES. NORMY.

" 'August 17, subject's losses: $5000. That evening sends following cablegram: DEAR AUNT BELLA, WE ARE REALLY ONTO SOMETHING. AGENT AGREES TO BE ON OUR SIDE AND SAP THEM FROM WITHIN. HE SAYS DOUBLE AGENTS GET DOUBLE PAY. SOUNDS FAIR ENOUGH. NEEDS ANOTHER $5000. MUM, DON'T FORGET, IS THE WORD, NORMY.

" 'August 18, subject's losses: $5000. Sends following cablegram: DEAR AUNT BELLA, THINGS COMING TO A HEAD. NEED $5000 FOR INCIDENTAL EXPENSES—MICROFILM, INVISIBLE INK, SECRETARIAL HELP, ETC. ITEMIZED LIST TO FOLLOW. KEEP THIS UNDER YOUR HAT. NORMY.' "

The old man looked up from his notebook. "Might I ask you about this Miss Brown?"

"She doesn't happen to be any of your darn business," said Brown, through clenched teeth. The old man waited. At last Brown said, "You might say that I'm her favorite nephew. You might say that the money was her life savings."

"I meant is she a bit—potty? Do you still say 'potty'?" asked the old man.

" 'Peculiar' might be better," said Brown.

"I must jot that down," said the old man, scribbling in his notebook. "And now where were we?

" 'August 19, by 5 P.M. subject's *winnings* total $38,000; by midnight, $88,000; by closing time,

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$123,000. Subject returns to hotel where, in answer to inquiry, is informed that next train for Paris is at 1:47 P.M.

" 'August 20, subject checks out of hotel at 10:37 A.M., leaves bags at station, wanders through streets looking in store windows. Noon finds subject in front of Casino. Subject smiles as if pleasantly surprised, and with glance at wrist watch, enters Casino.' "

The old man closed his notebook and looked up. "By 2:30 you had lost $56,000, and by 3:30, $123,000. And here we are. I must add in conclusion that San Sabastiano for several years now has requested in the most vigorous terms that the railway provide us with a morning service to Paris. Now perhaps we had better go," he said, preparing to rise.

"Hold on a minute," said Brown, and he began to slap the palm of one hand with the back of the other. "I have certain rights. You can't just put me on a train and run me out of town. Nothing you've said would hold up in a court of law."

The old man settled back on the bench. "Ah, now I can understand your hostility," he said. "Believe me there was never a question of a law having been broken. Consider for yourself how odd it would look if gay, carefree, light-hearted San Sebastiano had a law making it a crime to attempt suicide. What would people say? Why would anyone even dream of committing suicide here?"

"You mean that technically speaking," said Brown, "I could jump off this cliff this very moment and you could do nothing?"

The old man nodded. "It would be perfectly legal. But law is a funny thing, Mr. Brown. If some future historian, for example, were to try to understand the people of the Twentieth Century from a study of their books of law alone, would he, do you think, see them as they were, or as they feared they were, or as they hoped they might be?

"A particular case: what would this future historian of ours think of a certain law in force in San Sebastiano which says that our police must clean their revolvers daily—nothing unusual in that—but, the law continues, in a secluded yet public place in the open air? Legend has it that one Sub-Inspector Auguste Petitjean discharged his revolver as he was cleaning it while seated in his bath. The tub and walls, as it happened, were marble, and Sub-Inspector Petitjean was shot seventeen times in as many places by that single ricocheting bullet.

"By some miracle he recovered and returned to the force only to be subsequently discharged when it was discovered that he had developed a psychological block against firing his revolver—or, as another version of the story has it, against taking a bath. Whichever version is

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correct, the law is there nevertheless. Were you to try to jump I would be obliged to clean my revolver in public and it might accidentally discharge, the bullet striking you in the left calf. Conveniently enough, the hospital is located right next to the railway station.

"I had intended, by the way, to say before that I am sorry your train ticket is second class. By all rights it should be first class, but the authorities view the situation otherwise. You see our Eighth Bureau, dealing exclusively in cases such as yours, is organized into three divisions based on the amount of money lost by the subject—not winnings that happen to be lost again, you understand, but his own personal investment.

"The first division, headed by Inspector Guizot, deals with amounts of $5000 or less: the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker. Traditionally his subjects travel third class.

"My own division, the second, deals with amounts of $5000 to $50,000. By the way, we use American dollars as a standard out of simple convenience. That was why I received quite a start a while back when I realized that in your case we were dealing in Canadian dollars. For a moment I was afraid, forgive me, that you might be in Guizot's division. In any event, traditionally my subjects go second class.

"The third division, under Baron de Mirabelle, deals with sums in excess of $50,000. His subjects, of course, go first class.

"However, a few years ago the railways did away with third class. It was decided that Guizot's would go second class. What else could they do? Fine, I said, but then I humbly submit that mine should go first class. But the authorities were blind to the justice of it, and de Mirabelle, though sympathetic, kept smiling in that cultured way of his.

"A very distinguished person, the Baron: always in evening dress and with a black patch, sometimes over one eye, sometimes over the other. I often tell the story of how the Baron acquired his eye patch. I like to think it makes my own subjects' losses appear less significant.

"One day around the end of the last war a large burly soldier arrived in San Sebastiano. He had a system for roulette, as we all do, and $200,000—the accumulated combat pay and savings of his entire regiment, which he had promised to increase a hundredfold.

"This he promptly proceeded to do. His system was based on what he called his 'lucky lower-left bicuspid.' He would survey the roulette table, from number to number, until his bicuspid throbbed. That number he would bet. And he would win astronomical sums, millions, night after night.

"Finally the day arrived when the Casino, short of a miracle, would open its doors for the last time. The soldier dined alone be-

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forehand at Chez Tintin. At the end of the meal there was an altercation. The waiter accused him of overtipping. The soldier threated to ram a wad of banknotes down the waiter's throat and moved toward him with a bobbing and weaving motion, the result, we were later to learn, of considerable experience in the ring where he was known as—"

The old man thought for a moment. "Breaker Baker, or something like that," he said. "Politely but firmly the waiter struck him on the head with a bottle, Chateau Pommefrit, 1938. The soldier regained consciousness to find his celebrated tooth on the floor in front of him. He rushed to the Casino and with the tooth clenched in his fist, surveyed the table. Nothing happened.

"But then, as his eye passed number 14, something in his jaw throbbed faintly—his lower-*right* bicuspid! He bet and lost. Again the bicuspid throbbed, more insistently. He bet again and lost. And so on into the night. By closing time he was penniless and the right side of his jaw was swollen, throbbing as indiscriminately as any common toothache.

"The next day, when the soldier tried to take his life, Baron de Mirabelle, of course, was waiting. But at the railway station the soldier grew belligerent and came at the Baron, bobbing and weaving, catching the Baron with a right cross to the eye. Finally two Travelers' Aid people had to force the soldier onto the train. Not a moment too soon either, for at the news of his losses his regiment had mobilized and units had already reached the outskirts of San Sebastiano, thirsting for his blood. The Baron's eye had a fine bruise for a week. He fancied himself in the eye patch and has worn it to this day."

"Let's get back to me," said Brown. "What if your bullet didn't stop me? What if I crawled to the edge and with my last breath threw myself to my death?"

"Believe me," said the old man, "that is just not the way it is done. The suicide, above all others, wants to leave life erect, not on his hands and knees. He wants to savor that last moment. He stops to smoke a final cigarette, to gather his thoughts together into an epigram of one sort of the other, to—and this happens more frequently than you might imagine—to remove his wrist watch. Placing it where? Of course, in his pocket.

"How 'peculiar' we are and how lovable, eh, Mr. Brown. And here is something equally convenient for me in my work: how many turn to say, 'Why are you following me?'? As if it should make any difference to them if I were to leap over the cliff right behind them. No, Mr. Brown, man always wants to pause a bit before spitting in life's eye, before jumping, before becoming both the spitter and the spittle."

Brown rested his head in his

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hands and without looking up, said, "I guess you win." Then his chin began to tremble again. "I just want you to know that I can see right through you people," he said. "You don't give a darn if I kill myself or not as long as I don't do it here. I can lose my aunt's life savings in your Casino, oh, sure. But I can't jump off your gay, carefree little cliff." He rubbed his eyes. "Well, I say the hell with you all."

The old man moved to put his hand on the young man's shoulder, then thought better of it. He leaned forward. "Mr. Brown, we must all set a boundary on our compassion or we would turn our faces to the wall and not get out of bed in the morning. San Sebastiano's humble frontiers are the limits of mine. You must forgive me if I find that quite enough. Before, when I told you something of our history, I hoped to prepare you to understand why we cannot allow you and the others to carry out your little plans. For what would be the result? A suicide rate, a per capita statistic, so misleading and grotesque that it would reflect on the whole tenor of life in light-hearted, hurdy-gurdy San Sebastiano.

"Besides, aren't you being a bit severe. The railway ticket and the money will take you to Paris where your Embassy will arrange modest transportation home. Confess your little indiscretion. Give Aunt Bella the pleasure of forgiving her favorite nephew."

"And what about my father," said Brown. "Did I tell you he's got fists like hams? Like hams!" Brown stared down at his shoes and shook his head back and forth.

After watching him for a few moments, the old man looked down at his own shoes and said in a quiet voice, "You know, Mr. Brown, soon I will be retiring and I have often thought these last few years of all the people I have taken to the train. What are they doing? How are they getting on? How many children do they have? Do they, I wonder, ever remember the day Hector Jouvet—that is to say, myself—put them on the train? I am not being sentimental. I tell you this because I want to describe for you a silly daydream of mine, solely because it might amuse you.

"In my daydream it is the day of my retirement. I enter my favorite café. Georges, the owner, stands behind the bar reading a newspaper. 'Good day, Monsieur Jouvet,' he says. 'Would you step out back with me for a moment?'

"Puzzled, I follow him out to the back where they have the large room they rent out for banquets. Everything is dark. Suddenly the lights blaze on. I am taken aback. I am surprised. The room is filled with half-remembered faces—stockbrokers, bank tellers, church wardens, trustees of estates of widows and orphans. Across the front wall is a large banner: *The Friends of*

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Hector Jouvet. First Annual Convention.

"Amid applause and well wishes I take my place at the head table beside those special people, whoever they might be, who had gone on from their visit to San Sebastiano to positions of eminence in their own countries—a statesman, a bishop, a magnate or two, and—who knows, Mr. Brown?—perhaps even a famous dentist.

"We eat and at the end of the meal I am presented with a gold cigarette lighter. I could show you the very one in a shop window not far from where I live. It is inscribed: *To our friend Hector Jouvet from The Friends of Hector Jouvet.* Then in six different languages they sing *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow,* and end by pounding on the tables.

"I stand up. I am deeply moved. I always feel this particular moment most vividly and how deeply I am moved. Then I speak. In my mind's eye I see all this very clearly. But though my mouth is moving I cannot hear what I am saying. I only feel my own astonishment at the wisdom and simplicity of my words. They are saying everything I had wanted to say to each person in the room on his particular day. But I cannot hear the words. I can only see their faces smiling and nodding."

The old man stopped abruptly and cleared his throat. "But of course all this nonsense takes place only in my imagination. The people I have taken to the train do not know each other. Oh, one or two might meet by chance. Perhaps in his cups, while talking of youthful indiscretions, one might mention Hector Jouvet. 'What?' the other might say, 'you knew Jouvet, too?' And they might talk of afternoons at the cliffside in San Sebastiano or even of forming a club. But it would come to nothing because they were only one or two.

"How regrettable, Mr. Brown, because I have all their names and they wouldn't be so hard to locate—except, you understand, it would be out of place for me to take the initiative. As a matter of fact, I carry the list with me should the same idea occur to someone or other as I take him to the train. You might be interested in seeing the list, Mr. Brown. I think I have it here somewhere."

As the old man fumbled through his pockets, he laughed nervously and said, "I don't imagine, Mr. Brown, that you would care to be the first president of The Friends of Hector Jouvet?"

Brown looked up from his shoes. "Did I tell you my father was heavyweight champion of the Canadian Army? Did I tell you what they called him because of those big fists of his?" said the young man with a shudder. "They called him The Buster."

The old man looked puzzled. "Buster Brown. Buster Brown," he

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said thoughtfully. "But of course, of course, it was Buster Brown, not Breaker Baker. How stupid of me and how delightful! Buster Brown was the name of the soldier who gave the Baron his eye patch."

"You mean the one who lost all those millions was my father? The one with the lucky lower-left bicuspid?" said Brown with an astonished and broadening grin.

The old man nodded. "How appropriate he should have turned to dentistry. Your father was the man who almost broke the bank at San Sebastiano. A popular song was written about him at the time. As we walk to the station I will teach it to you, if you like."

Brown jumped to his feet. "Boy, I'll say I would," he said. "Even just enough to hum the tune every once in a while."

"I'm sure that would be very useful, Mr. Brown," smiled the old man. "Ah, it is a great day for the Eighth Bureau. First the father and now the son. And after that who knows, eh, Mr. Brown? A fine-looking young man like yourself. Well, come along or we will miss our train."

He took Brown by the elbow and they started down the path. "Mr. Brown," said the old man as they went, "do you recall my mentioning The Friends of Hector Jouvet? It occurs to me that if such a club were ever formed it might offer your father an honorary membership. I don't imagine he's being invited to many regimental reunions."

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"Of course, it was all pretty weird and sinister. Nevertheless—"

MANY HAPPY RETURNS

by HUGH B. CAVE

THE HOUSE WAS AN OLD ONE ON an old road, miles from anywhere, but the freshly painted sign by its driveway—TOURISTS' REST—was as reassuring as a cleric's smile of welcome.

"Let's," Grace Martin said, squeezing her husband's hand. "There's no telling what we might find!"

Their car was already bulging with antiques collected in six states, but Tom Martin didn't care. He had just acquired his M.A., a teaching job at a highly regarded prep school, and a beautiful bride. "Done," he agreed without hesitation.

The warped and weathered door creaked open as they wriggled from the car. A man as old as they had expected, with a crown of white hair glowing in the dusk, limped down the rickety steps to greet them. An equally old woman, doll-dainty, smiled and nodded in the doorway.

It was the woman who escorted the newlyweds to their upstairs room. "Our name is Wiggin," she said, "but please call me Anna. And when you've freshened up, do come down for tea."

Grace Martin became enthusiastic about the massive four-poster bed while her husband irreverently bounced on it and pronounced it comfortable. They "freshened up" by lamplight and went downstairs to a dim parlor filled with antiques and the smell of age.

Anna Wiggin poured tea into fine old cups, and her husband Jasper, in reply to Grace Martin's question, said in a cracked voice, "No, we do not collect antiques. Not really. We have just acquired these things as we needed them.

"You are only just married, you two," Anna said with her smile. "I can always tell."

"Five days," Grace admitted.

"You are very young," Jasper said.

"Not so young. I'm twenty-two. Tom is twenty-four."

The old man moved his head up and down as if to say he had made a guess and the guess was correct. He did not say how old he and Anna were. He did remark, "I am a little older than my wife, also," then sipped his tea and added, "You must tell Anna your birthdays. She will read your futures."

"By our birthdays?" Grace Martin said.

"Oh, yes."

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"How can you do that, Mrs. Wiggin?"

"I can do it." The doll-woman leaned closer, nodding and nodding. "When were you born, my dear?"

"May eleventh."

"It won't work, you know," Tom Martin said with a grin. "She—" Then puzzled by the old woman's expression, he was silent.

Jasper rose from his chair and placed his hands on his wife's frail shoulders. Though all but transparent in the lamplight, the hands were strong and long-fingered. "Now, Anna," he said softly, "do not be excited."

Grace Martin sent a half-frightened glance at her husband and said, "Is there something special about that date?"

"It is Anna's birthday also."

"Oh, how nice! We *are* special, then, aren't we?"

"Don't go putting on airs," Tom Martin chided. "You're forgetting —"

"Now, darling, don't spoil it."

"I will get some more tea," the old man said. "Fresh cups, too. We must have a toast."

The others were joking about the birthday when he returned from the kitchen with a tray. Placing four full cups on the table, he sat down again. The lamplight splashed his shadow on a wall as he raised a hand and said, "To the day that gave us two such lovely ladies."

They laughed and drank.

"You see, my dear," the old man said to his wife, "it never fails."

"What never fails?" Tom Martin asked.

"Only yesterday Anna was saying we would have to leave this house and find another. So few travelers use this old road any more. And even with many guests we sometimes wait years, of course."

"Wait for what?" Tom said.

"They have to have the same birthday, you see."

Tom nodded solemnly. It was past the old folks' bedtime, he supposed. When you were that old, a break with custom could make the mind a bit fuzzy. "Well, of course —" He started to rise. Grace and he had had a long day too, more than three hundred miles of driving.

"Wait, please," Jasper Wiggin said. "It is only fair that you understand."

With a tolerant smile Tom sank down again.

"There is a mathematical master plan, you see," the old man said. "Each day so many people are born, so many die. The plan insures a balance."

"Really?" Tom suppressed a yawn.

"I can simplify it for you, I think, if you will pay close attention. Each date—that is to say, each eleventh of May or ninth of June or sixth of December and so forth—is a com-

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partment in time. Now suppose a thousand people are born today, to take their place with all the thousands born on this date in previous years. If the plan were perfect, all those born today would live exactly a year longer than those born one year ago, and so on. You follow me?"

"Uh-huh," Tom said sleepily.

"But the plan is not perfect. There is a thinning out through sickness and accidents—there has been from the beginning—and as a consequence, some of those born today will die before the expiration date, and others will live beyond it to maintain the balance."

"Sure," Tom mumbled.

"Each time compartment in each of the time zones is controlled this way. Life moves according to mathematics, just as the stars do."

"Remarkable," Tom said. Across the table his wife Grace was practically asleep. "What about the normal increase in population?"

"Oh, that's accounted for. So are wars, plagues, and things of that sort. If we had more time, I could make it all quite clear."

"You discovered this yourself, Mr. Wiggin?"

"Oh, no. There was a man from Europe staying with us one summer—a mathematical genius named Marek Dziok. Not in this house, of course; we have moved many times since then. Dziok had an accident—he was very old, and one night he fell down the stairs, poor man—but before he died, he took us into his confidence."

"I see."

"You don't believe me?" Jasper Wiggin said. "Dziok was writing a book—a philosophy based on his mathematics. He never finished it. But I have the manuscript . . ." He left his chair and limped to a bookcase, from which he lifted out a thin, paper-bound sheaf of papers. "Perhaps you would like—but no, you won't have time." Shaking his head, he put the sheaf of pages back.

"I guess I'd better take my wife to bed," Tom Martin said. "She's asleep."

"Yes, it works faster on women."

"What works faster?"

"The powder."

"You mean you put something —" Staring at his wife, Tom placed his hands flat on the table and pushed himself erect. It required enormous effort. "You mean—"

"You haven't been listening, have you?" the old man complained sadly. "And I've tried so hard to explain. Your wife and mine share the same time compartment, don't you see? You know yourself by now that Anna and I are much older than people get to be *naturally*. There's only the one way to do it."

"By—by killing off—"

"Precisely."

"And you think you're going to kill *Grace?*"

"It's been nineteen years since the

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last one for Anna," the old man sighed. "Hasn't it, dear?"

The doll-woman nodded. "Jasper has been luckier. He had one eight years ago."

"You're crazy!" Tom Martin shouted. "Both of you, you're crazy! Grace, wake up! We're getting out of here!" But when he leaned across the table to shake his wife awake, his legs went limp. He collapsed onto his chair. His head fell on his hands.

After a moment he was able with terrible concentration to bring the faces of Jasper and Anna Wiggin into focus again. There was something he had to remember—something he or they had said earlier, or he should have said but hadn't . . .

"It won't hurt, you know," the old man was saying sympathetically. "You'll both be asleep."

"Both . . . both . . ."

"Oh, yes. We'll have to kill you too, of course. Otherwise you'd tell."

"Wait," Tom whispered. The room was filling with shadows now. "Wait . . ."

"But it won't be a waste, your dying. Somebody in *your* compartment will benefit, you know. Somebody with your birthday."

"Birthday," Tom repeated. That was it—birthday. "You're wrong about Grace—about—her—birthday." He made a supreme effort to get the words out before it was too late. "I tried—to tell you. She wasn't born May eleventh—"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Martin," the old man said sadly.

"No, no, it's true! She was born May eleventh in *Manila*. The Philippines. Her father taught—taught college there. Different—time—zone. Don't you see? A whole—day—different—".

The room went dark. In the darkness, though, he thought he heard the old woman begin to weep, and was sure he heard the old man saying, "Now, now, Anna, don't do that. There will be another one before too long."

Then nothing . . .

He was in the big four-poster bed when a shaft of sunlight wakened him. His wife lay asleep at his side. Their clothes were neatly folded on chairs.

Tom yawned and sat up. His wife opened her eyes and said, "Hi."

"You know something? I don't remember going to bed last night," Tom said.

"Neither do I."

"I don't remember getting undressed or folding my clothes like that. Grace"—he was frowning now—"I *never* fold my clothes. You know that."

"All I remember," she said with a yawn, "is getting sleepy at the table." She looked at her watch. "Anyway, we'd better be moving. It's after nine."

When they were ready to go they walked downstairs together, Tom

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carrying their suitcases. Anna Wiggin came from the parlor to greet them. "Did you sleep well?" she asked, peering into their faces.

"I'll say we did," Tom said.

"You were both so tired," Anna said, nodding. "Won't you have breakfast before you go?"

They said no, thanks, they were late as it was, and Tom took out his wallet to pay for their night's lodging. Anna said wait, please, she would get her husband, he was out in the field. So Tom and Grace Martin went to their car with the suitcases and Tom went back into the house alone.

It came back to him when he walked into the parlor and saw the table and the tea service and the extra cups. The extra cups! At first it was fuzzy and confused; then it sharpened and he remembered everything—just as Grace had remembered everything up to the time of *her* falling asleep.

He snatched the sheaf of papers from the bookcase. It was indeed a manuscript, handwritten and yellowed with age. Its title was *The Mathematics of Life* and its author was Marek Dziok.

Under the author's name, in a different hand, was written: *Born 1613. Died (by accident) 1802.*

There was a sound of footsteps in the kitchen. Tom thrust the manuscript inside his shirt and quickly stepped away from the bookcase.

"You know, I'm still sleepy," his wife said later as their car purred along a parkway. "It must have been that house. They were nice old people, though, weren't they?"

"Remarkable," Tom said.

"I wonder how old they really are."

Tom did not answer. He had already finished his figuring and now he was thinking of the pilfered manuscript inside his shirt. That, too, was remarkable. With the information it contained, a man could live a long time.

Of course, it was all pretty weird and sinister. Nevertheless . . .

In spite of himself, he began to think about birthdays—his wife's and his own.

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a new story by

AUTHOR: **ALLEN KIM LANG**

TITLE: ***Murder in a Nudist Camp***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: Pottawattomie, Indiana

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The title of the story speaks for itself. But don't jump to conclusions—EQMM has not changed its editorial policy . . . this is a most enjoyable story!*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

WITH ONE BROWN KNEE FOLDED over the other like the knot in a pretzel, Professor Amos Cooney sprawled in his canvas chair, watching his wife's knitting needles chew orange and black yarns into the scarf he'd unwrap, with cries of delight, on his 75th birthday dinner. Already, Professor Cooney observed with some trepidation, his neckpiece was six feet long and wide enough to conceal the Notre Dame backfield.

With a slight shudder he brought his mind back to the business at hand—the death of the manager of the PennyWise Supermarket. "We'll send flowers in the name of the Club," he said. "Mr. King often assisted me when I visited his store to buy our groceries."

Spread out on cotton blankets and beach towels, and oiled like a school of Channel swimmers, lay the other members of the Spice Pond Swimming Club—a euphemism for what could more accurately be called the Spice Pond Nudist Camp. The newspaper which told of King's death—one week after the $40,000 robbery during which he'd been shot—was crumpled beside Anne Anders' elbow. "He was always so cheerful," she mused. "He'd come bouncing into the Bank half an hour before the regular opening time, tell me how much money he wanted in each

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denomination, then chatter and kid with me so that I usually had to count it out three times. Probably I was the last person to see Mr. King before he was shot—except the murderers, of course. I visited him—Mr. King, I mean—at the hospital, but he never regained consciousness."

"And now he's dead," Frank Ferguson said. "The police aren't looking for thieves—now they're looking for a pair of murderers."

"They'll never find 'em," Jason Bailey, the newest member of the Nudist Camp, predicted. "Those eye masks—"

"Half masks, or dominoes," Professor Cooney murmured.

"—made a good disguise," Bailey continued, wagging his red beard. "The thieves were never identified, so they probably will never be caught. Darned shame, too."

"Forty thousand bucks will take two men a long way from Pottawattomie, Indiana, in a week," Frank Ferguson, Jr., thirteen years old, observed. "I'll bet they don't even know that Mr. King died today—or care."

"They'll find out," Professor Cooney said, "when a policeman tells them. Meanwhile, ladies and gentlemen, we have a less serious matter to consider. According to Miss Toffler, our camp had an uninvited visitor this morning."

Mary Cooney looked up from her endless scarf. "What did he look like, Tina?" she asked.

"A little man with a face like a fist, all chin and nose and forehead," Miss Toffler said.

"When was this?" Frank Ferguson asked.

"Early." Tina propped her sunglasses up on her forehead, revealing a pair of brown and sincere eyes. "I woke up about five thirty. This is my first day of vacation, and I didn't want to waste a minute of sunlight. I've gotten pretty pale over the winter. Anyway, I went to the kitchen to fill the percolator and plug it in. Then I ran down here to the pond for an eye-opener swim. I was about halfway when I saw this fellow in khaki trousers, heavy shoes, a light jacket, and a red cap. He was skulking over by the entrance road, as if he were waiting for someone."

"My goodness," Anne Anders said. "Anybody should be ashamed to be wearing all those clothes on such a beautiful spring day."

"Maybe he was," Tina said. "The instant he saw me he took off behind the toolshed. I ran to wake up Jason and Professor Cooney, and they tried to find the man."

"I ran all the way to the entrance gate," Amos Cooney said, scratching at a fresh briar-scratch on his right thigh. "The electric lock hadn't been tampered with, and the gate was closed. Meanwhile Jason searched the buildings, but there was no sign of our guest. Tell them what else you saw, Tina."

"I swam across the pond and

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back," she said. "When I stepped out onto the beach to get my towel, I looked up toward the highway and saw a flash of light—like the reflection off the lens of a telescope or a pair of binoculars. I dropped the towel and jumped right back into the pond."

"Modest girl," the Professor said. He drew back his feet to make way for tanned four-year-olds, the Ferguson twins, scampering by in chase of their ragged puppy. The trio splashed into the shallows of Spice Pond, yipping in fine disregard of their elders. "I would guess that our spy perched himself on the scaffolding of the billboards beside the highway, the only vantage point from which one can peer into our camp," Cooney added.

"We can't allow that sort of thing," Frank Ferguson said. He was father to six of the children who shouted and jumped around them, and of a seventh held in Frances' arms beside him. "What would happen if this spy had a camera with him, one with a telephoto lens?"

"Doom," Jason Bailey boomed over his beard.

"My goodness," Anne Anders whispered. Her blush slipped over her face and down her body like a pink shift. "What would Mr. Mueller, the chief cashier, say if someone showed him a picture of me dressed like this?"

"First 'Wow!'—then 'You're fired!'" Jason Bailey guessed. He smoothed his mustache into line with his beard, gazing up toward the trees that screened the grounds of the Spice Pond Nudist Camp (Swimming Club) from the public highway.

"I'd be out of a job faster than you can say 'Unemployment Compensation,'" Frank Ferguson said. "Pictures of me and Frances and the kids romping around *au naturel* out here would be held incompatible with the dignity expected of the manager of the Pottawattomie office of the State Employment Service. Our legislators are pretty square."

Professor Cooney tossed a pebble out into the pond, splashing the flailing pup. "It is deplorable that we lack the freedom our friends on the continent enjoy," he said. "In England, Germany, Finland, nudism is no more looked down on than stamp collecting. Our problem simply proves that we have years to spend yet, educating our fellow Americans on the naturist way of life."

"We haven't got years, Professor," Frances Ferguson pointed out. "Frank and I have a two-week vacation, which I'd just as soon not waste chasing off a Peeping Tom." Her slim body, flecked with cinnamon freckles, belied her status as a seven-times mother—although the baby in her arms, whose diaper made him overdressed in this company, helped remind them.

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"I say, let's call the police," Tina Toffler said.

"They'd only tell us to put on pants," Jason Bailey growled. "You know how they treated folks caught wearing monokinis on Chicago beaches, those topless bathing suits? Well, they'd be even less sympathetic toward all of us in nokinis."

"We have a trespasser," Cooney said. "I will refer to him as Mr. Peeper." He sprang up from his canvas chair to pace the sand in his splayed bare feet, very much the popular image of the absent-minded professor, one who'd gone directly from the shower room to the classroom. "Our problem is to utilize Mr. Peeper's psychological moment to our advantage."

"Psychological moment?" Anne Anders asked, wrinkling her nose. "Gee whiz, Professor, *Now* is the moment."

"The phrase, my dear, refers not to time but to leverage," Amos Cooney lectured. He turned to one side as though expecting to find a blackboard behind him, his fingers pinched as though he were holding a piece of chalk. "It is an engineering term that we scientists of the mind have borrowed. You suggest, Miss Toffler, that we call the police. I counter with the proposal that we cause Mr. Peeper, himself, to call the police."

"Dearest, you're getting awfully pedantic," Mary Cooney observed, looking up from her Halloween-colored scarf.

"To be brief, then, for brevity is the soul of wit," Cooney said, flashing a grin toward his wife, "I propose that we put on a one-act playlet for a one-man audience. No ordinary play, my friends. A murder."

"We've had our murder in Pottawattomie," Jason Bailey said. "It's not presently a popular sport."

"Bear with me," Cooney said, pacing again, one finger held alongside his nose. "We have a voyeur in the billboards, a fellow spying on our innocent amusements through guilty opera glasses—or even, as Mr. Ferguson suggests, through the viewfinder of an unauthorized camera. So? So we give him a real show, a plot to shake him more deeply than even the sight of our lovely Tina, here, or Anne, or Frances, or my Mary's maturer charms. We commit a murder for him to see and report."

Jason Bailey leaned back on his elbows, laughing. "A murder? Who's going to volunteer to get himself killed?"

"I will," Frank Ferguson said. "Perhaps a clean-living young architect like you never heard of the old badger game, Jason. Here's how it works. You come storming up to me aiming a pistol loaded with blanks, waving it and threatening to blow my head off. I back up, protesting innocence. You draw a bead and fire. I slap a handful of

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ketchup, held ready for that purpose, to my chest. *Ka-pow! Splat! Argh!* I stumble backwards, gory with tomato sauce, and fall lifeless to the sand."

"You've been reading our comic books, Dad," Junior Ferguson said.

Jason Bailey stood up and bored a toe into the sand. "You teach psychology, Professor Cooney, but I think you're wrong if you think Mr. Peeper will be persuaded to run to the cops. He'd just run. At most, he'd phone in an anonymous tip. Why should a man admit to the Pottawattomie police that he's been sneaking telescopic peeks at our pretty girls in their birthday suits?"

"Because of Mr. King's murder," Amos Cooney said. "Mr. Peeper, filled for the moment with a citizen's urge to improve the public peace—and morals—will be driven *toward* us, not away."

"We've got to try something," Tina Toffler said. "Maybe the Spice Pond Swimming Club is everything it says on our membership form—The Midwest's Oldest, Newest Nature Camp; but to outsiders, nudism means revels, Roman orgies, and wickedness. We've got to preserve our privacy or we'll lose our Club."

"My goodness," Anne Anders said. "If I knew that photographs of me were being passed around in Pottawattomie bars and locker rooms, I'd just die! I really would. I'd have to leave home. My family would never understand—especially Daddy. I could talk till I was blue in the face about the philosophical, psychological, and physiological values of sun culture, the way Professor Cooney does, but Daddy would just blush and disown me."

"What we should do," Jason Bailey announced, lending his statement all the authority of his jutting chin and beard, "is to sneak up to that billboard, grab hold of Mr. Peeper, and bust him one in the mouth. Professor Cooney, you're the Club's president and a teacher, but you just don't know how to handle sneaky characters."

"I prefer," Amos Cooney said, "finesse to fist-in-the-face."

"Prof, the cops are busy," Jason went on. "They're trying to get a lead on those two guys in Lone Ranger masks who shot Mr. King. Now, do you think they'll be amused when they come howling up here to catch another murderer and we tell 'em it was all a charade planned to trap a Peeping Tom? Just you see. They'll order us all into ankle-length Mother Hubbards."

"Don't be stubborn, Jason," Frances Ferguson said. "It can't do any harm for you to 'murder' Frank, and it might solve our problem."

"I'll get the ketchup, Dad," Frank Junior volunteered. He raced toward the kitchen door of the Spice Pond clubhouse, leaping

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across the canvas-covered rotisserie en route.

"Who's got a gun?" Amos Cooney inquired.

"The twins' cowboy outfits are in the back seat of our station wagon," Frances Ferguson said.

"Do they go Bang?" Anne Anders asked.

"They go bang and they smoke and look lethal enough to concern the U.S. Disarmament Commission," Mrs. Ferguson assured the girl. "For seven-ninety-eight, plus tax, they'd better show some action."

Young Frank trotted back to the pond with a squeeze bottle of ketchup concealed from the Peeper in a folded dishtowel. "That's fine," his father said. "Now we'll have to make certain our watcher is on post up in his billboard."

Amos Cooney gazed over his spectacles at the three younger women. "Ladies, if you'll saunter toward the clubhouse like pedestrian Ladies Godiva, I'm sure you'll catch our voyeur's eye. Frank, keep a careful watch out toward the highway. Don't look directly at Mr. Peeper—we don't want to frighten him off."

Anne Anders sat quite still, her knees hunched up to her chin. "I don't think I can do it," she said. "Being spied on makes my flesh creep. If Mr. Peeper is so interested in naturism, why doesn't he just join the Spice Pond Swimming Club? There's plenty of sun for one more member."

"Think, Miss Anders, think!" Professor Cooney said. "A person must demonstrate excellent moral character to become a member of our little society. Correct? Mr. Peeper is not a person of good moral character. Therefore, he must spy on us, condemned forever to be an outsider, a looker-in upon our gentle revels. Until—" he pinched off his spectacles and wagged them at her—"until we bring him in here and prove the wholesomeness of the nudist way, of the sunlit path to health."

Jason Bailey grunted, still unconvinced. "I'd a lot rather ease up through the woods as I said, catch the guy, and make him eat his camera or telescope or whatever. He could put your ketchup on 'em, Frank."

Tina Toffler tapped her sunglasses down into place on her nose. "Here we go," she said, grabbing the reluctant Anne Anders' arm. "Frances, give Frank the baby." The three women walked toward the clubhouse, as tense as though children were following them with snowballs.

"He's there!" young Frank whispered. "I saw something move—and a glint of light."

"Good," Professor Cooney said. He rubbed his hands together. "Thus the white mouse enters our maze."

"Amos," Mary Cooney observed,

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taking scissors to the two balls of yarn and ending her birthday scarf at last, "sometimes you act all of ten years old."

"Practical psychology, my dear, is my passion," the Professor said. "Mr. Bailey, if you'll get one of those toy pistols from the Ferguson automobile, we'll hit the boards with our little farce."

Frank Ferguson, preparing his prop, squirted a handful of ketchup into his right palm.

"Understand," Jason Bailey said, "I'm playing this role under protest. If your amateur theatricals turn out to be a turkey, don't blame the man who's playing the heavy." He got up and walked around the canvas-covered rotisserie—a plastic bubble in which one could sunbathe in the coldest weather—toward the parking lot.

"I suggest we adjourn to the infants' wading pool, up the hill," Amos Cooney said. "It will serve as a stage easily visible from Mr. Peeper's billboard balcony."

"Theater in the round is all the rage nowadays," Frank Ferguson remarked. He looked down into his ketchup-filled hand. "However our audience reacts," he said, "I'm a cinch to be hit with tomato."

"Everybody be casual," Cooney cautioned his amateur troupe. "If the other Club members, over on the volleyball court and in the pond, don't realize what's going on, they'll act even more realistically. Frank, you be especially careful not to smile."

"I'm a Method Actor," the victim designate said. "I'm thinking of all the things in my past that should have got me shot, and didn't. The thought will keep me properly grim." They walked up beside the wading pool. "Here comes my nemesis," Ferguson said.

Approaching the water-filled rubber doughnut in which the Club's babies dunked were Tina Toffler and Jason Bailey. Chasing Bailey was Tommy Ferguson, the right-handed twin, screaming that the red-bearded man had stolen his pistol. Pure ham all the way, Bailey held the toy gun down his right side, his face screwed up in an expression of insane anger. "One of us," he shouted, stepping over four-year-old Linda Walters, who was up to her navel in mudpies, "has got to go!"

"No, Jason!" Tina screamed, seizing his gun hand.

"It's too late now to stop me," Bailey yelled. He lifted the gun. "Take that, Ferguson, you rat!"

The toy gun behaved with all the vigor that the television advertisements of it had promised. *Crash! Twang-whee!* Smoke curled out of the muzzle. Little Tommy danced around Bailey's knees, crying that he wanted his gun back.

Frank Ferguson slapped his right, or ketchup, hand to his chest, leaped into the air, landed to reel about on one heel, his head back

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and his arms spread, then fell backward into the wading pool, narrowly missing young Miss Walters, who was washing off her mud shovel.

"Help!" Professor Cooney shouted. "Frank has been shot!"

Bill Walters, one of the nudists not in on the plot, ran up to grab Jason Bailey around the throat and shake him till the gun dropped to the ground. "You trying to give nudism a bad name?" he demanded.

"It's just a toy, Bill, but don't let on," Bailey said.

"What are you nuts up to, Jason?" Walters asked.

"Trot me into the clubhouse, under the gun," Bailey instructed him. "I'll explain everything inside."

"The way everybody's acting, somebody must have spiked the breakfast coffee," Walters said. "Okay, Bailey. March. Don't try any tricks, or I'll blow a hole right through your picture tube."

His hands held high, Bailey allowed himself to be herded into the clubhouse, out of Mr. Peeper's sight. "It's always the man with the beard who's cast as the villain," he grumbled.

Frank Ferguson lay in the wading pool, only his knees visible over the rubber wall. Linda Walters peered down at him. "Big people supposed to swim in the pond," she pointed out.

"Go away, Linda," Ferguson muttered.

"All right." The youngster waddled off to retrieve her bucket, then hurried into the clubhouse to catch the rest of the show.

Frank Junior trotted out with a chair on his head. "Help me, Professor Cooney," he shouted. Together, the director of the play and young Ferguson lifted the temporary corpse onto the chair and bore it between them like a palanquin, dripping ketchup, into the clubhouse's kitchen door.

Ferguson washed off the rest of the ketchup at the sink. "Now we've got to wait, sweating out the reviews," he said.

"We wait," Cooney agreed. He walked over to the stove, lifted the lid from a bubbling kettle, and sniffed. "Fortunately, it is nearly lunchtime, as this splendid-smelling pepperpot soup the ladies have prepared reminds me," he said. His spectacles steamed up, so the Professor stepped back from the stove.

"It doesn't seem right, our feeding our faces while poor Frank Ferguson's body's growing cold," Tina Toffler remarked, placing a plate on the table before the corpse.

"Don't write me off before I've had a second helping," Ferguson said. "Dying is hard work. Please pass the coffee."

A telephone jangled out on the sundeck. "The gate phone!" Cooney exulted, jumping to his feet. He'd been trying on the orange-and-black scarf for size. One end nearly tripped him as he ran to

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grab the phone off its cradle. "Yes?" The answer caused Cooney to muffle the mouthpiece with the tail of his scarf. "It worked!" he shouted. "This is Sergeant Rolfe calling, of the Pottawattomie Police. He wants to come in."

"So push the gate button, Professor," Jason Bailey suggested.

"Of course." Cooney leaned on the button, then spoke into the phone. "Open the gate while the buzzer's sounding, Sergeant, and please remember to close it after you."

Frank Ferguson pushed back his plate, gulped a mouthful of coffee, and stood up. "Visitors coming!" he shouted. "Everybody get into formal dress."

"Darn," said one of the teen-aged boys, shoveling a last forkful into his mouth. "Ever'thin' will get cold." He ran with the others to the men's locker room to put on swim trunks. The girls and women scampered to their lockers on the far side of the sundeck, to return adjusting shorts and halters that could pass muster on the most conservative public beach.

Sergeant Rolfe, tall and lean as a Texan's notion of a Texan, stopped his sand-colored police sedan before the clubhouse. He got out to gaze around the playground above Spice Pond. Professor Cooney, wearing the ragged khaki trunks that had seen scant service during his sixty years in the naturist movement, trotted out to greet the policeman.

"Welcome to the Spice Pond Swimming Club, Sergeant," he said, holding out his hand. "I'm Amos Cooney."

"Of course you are, Professor," Sergeant Rolfe said, shaking the old man's hand. "I took your course in Abnormal Psychology three years ago."

"I remember, Edward," the Professor said. "You made good grades, too."

"Perhaps abnormal psychology might help me understand the events of a few minutes ago," Rolfe suggested, following Cooney into the clubhouse. "Where is the man who was so unconvincingly shot to death?"

"Up and about, able to take nourishment," Frank Ferguson said. He introduced himself to Rolfe, then demanded, "What do you mean, so unconvincingly?"

"A man who's been shot dead seldom leaps in an entrechat, twirls like a drunken dervish, and goes down cutting didoes like a cat on hot bricks," the sergeant said. "In my experience, such a victim says 'Oof!' and collapses."

"Perhaps I overacted a bit," Ferguson admitted reluctantly. "I'll bear your criticism in mind for our next production."

"If you'd care to take lunch with us, Sergeant, I'll explain what your informant saw, and ask a favor of you," Amos Cooney said.

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"Coffee would be welcome," Rolfe agreed. He walked into the dining hall and allowed himself to be introduced to the few members of the Spice Pond Swimming Club he didn't already know. Then he sat down and cuddled his hands around a coffee cup to hear Professor Cooney's story.

"You see," Amos Cooney began, "we've been bothered by a trespasser."

"A fellow about five-feet-three, wearing highhlaced boots, light brown trousers, a faded blue jacket, and a red cap," Sergeant Rolfe specified. "Right?"

"And a face like a fist," Tina Toffler added, speaking across the table.

"That's my man," Rolfe said.

"You've seen him?" Frank Ferguson demanded.

"Not since early this morning," the policeman said. He savored the coffee. "What was your little demonstration out by the wading pool supposed to accomplish, Professor?"

"I told them it was silly," Jason Bailey said.

"Our efforts have borne fruit," Professor Cooney pointed out. "Our purpose, Edward my boy, was to motivate Mr. Peeper—the fellow in the red cap, who scurried from the camp only to perch in the billboards with binoculars—to motivate him to call the police. When you got here, Sergeant, we intended to inquire of you who had reported the supposed murder. Knowing who Mr. Peeper was, we could then persuade him to respect our privacy. I fully expected your witness to come with you, Edward."

"You haven't seen him?"

"I saw him about six o'clock this morning," Tina Toffler said. "He was standing by the entrance road. When he saw me, he ran and hid."

"His name," Rolfe said, "is Boots MacClure. Last night he told a bartender that he had a fortune at his fingertips. The bartender told me. Bearing in mind Mr. MacClure's arrest record, I determined to follow him to his fortune. It seemed possible that he was one of the two masked gunmen who shot Mr. King at the PennyWise Supermarket last week, and made off with forty thousand dollars. I trailed MacClure here to the camp, early this morning. He came in and he hasn't left. Professor Cooney, with your permission, I'll inspect the grounds. MacClure is here somewhere."

"I'll come along," Jason Bailey volunteered. "In case you find the man, you may need help."

"Glad to have you, Mr. Bailey," Sergeant Rolfe said.

The touring policeman viewed the kids' wading pool, went down to Spice Pond to stare into the clear water that might be hiding the wanted man's body, walked north to the gulch where the railroad bounded the camp, and searched

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through the woods by the highway.

"No sign of him," Jason Bailey said. "He probably sneaked out."

"I think not," the sergeant said. "Let's look in the toolshed, and then explore your clubhouse. Boots MacClure is here, I'm certain."

MacClure didn't seem to be. He wasn't hiding in the coffin-sized box where the camp's croquet equipment was stored, or crouched by the garbage disposal unit under the sink, nor did MacClure occupy the narrow crawl space under the clubhouse. Rolfe finally stopped beside the rotisserie, covered through the spring and summer with its sheath of canvas.

"It's the rotisserie—a plastic hood," Amos Cooney explained. "Some of our members, wishing to retain their tans through the winter, bask in there, snug as toast."

"It's the only place we haven't searched," Rolfe said. He tugged at the tie ropes and peeled the canvas back from the plastic bubble.

Inside, lying on his face, was Mr. Boots MacClure. The camp's best Swedish-steel carving knife protruded from his ribs.

"Keep the kids away," Sergeant Rolfe said. He knelt to peer through the plastic. "Every minute my hunch looks righter," he murmured. "MacClure was one of the two PennyWise thieves. he came up here to meet his partner, and possibly to collect his half of the loot. King's death had made MacClure nervous—he wanted to get paid off so he could cut out."

"So he got paid off and cut up," Jason Bailey said. He stroked his beard with a thoughtful air. "Sergeant, do you think the robbery money is up here at Spice Pond?"

"I'd be surprised if it weren't," the policeman said. He tugged the canvas back over the rotisserie, concealing the corpse till the coroner could see it. "Let's go inside. I've got to make some phone calls."

"What a horrible thing to happen," Amos Cooney said. "It's a shame one of us didn't find MacClure before he was killed."

"One of you did," Rolfe said. He'd phoned into town for an ambulance, the Pottawattomie Police photographer, and the coroner. "May I have some more coffee?"

"Of course," Anne Anders said. "Too bad that liquor isn't allowed here. Something stronger than coffee might be a comfort."

"It's too bad that murder isn't also off-limits here," Jason Bailey said. He sat down between the policeman and Amos Cooney and pushed his empty cup forward for a refill. "Who do you think did it? Who was MacClure's partner, the person who killed him?"

"Can't say yet," Rolfe admitted. "The only description we have is that both men wore those oval masks over their eyes—"

"—called dominoes," Professor Cooney insisted. "Originally the word came from the Latin *dominus*,

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or master—a fascinating etymology —"

"Amos," Mary Cooney cautioned. "You're being professorial at a very awkward moment."

"An eye mask," Sergeant Rolfe said, persisting in his error. "Why not a handkerchief over the nose and mouth?" Anne Anders filled his cup with hot coffee. "Thank you," the policeman said.

Reaching for his cup, Rolfe bumped it with the back of his hand, slopping the steaming fluid onto the table in front of Jason Bailey who leaped up to keep from being burned. As he rose, Sergeant Rolfe plucked Bailey's red beard. The policeman was holding the triangle of false hair by the time Jason Bailey got to his feet, bare-faced.

Rolfe unfolded from the table and eased his pistol around toward Bailey's middle. "A domino, as the Professor calls that sort of mask, leaves the chin bare," he observed. "You shaved for the robbery, having prepared a false mustache and beard to glue on afterwards. Both thieves were bare-faced—therefore, bearded and mustached Jason Bailey would never even be suspected."

The false hair now lay on the table beside Rolfe's spilled coffee. "There's no money here," Jason Bailey said. Where the spirit gum had pulled free from his chin and upper lip, the skin was red and fuzzy. "MacClure was knifed by another trespasser."

"I propose," Amos Cooney said, "once the unfortunate Boots MacClure has been removed, to dig into the ground beneath the rotisserie. The man who hid a corpse there might have used the same safe-deposit box before."

"You haven't got a thing against me, Sergeant," Jason Bailey went on, his voice shaking slightly. "Wearing a false beard is no felony."

"The same Peeping Tom who so embarrassed Miss Toffler saw Boots MacClure run through the kitchen door," Rolfe said. "He also saw Professor Cooney take off up the road, and another man, Jason Bailey, go into the clubhouse after MacClure. The Peeping Tom's testimony will convict you, Bailey."

Anne Anders was blushing again. "It was *you* up there in that catbird seat, wasn't it, Sergeant Rolfe? Not MacClure? My goodness! Watching us run around in no more than a coat of tan—"

The policeman smiled. "My mind was on my work, Miss Anders," he said. "I'll admit, however, that I've never had a more delightful stakeout."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JOHN D. MACDONALD**

TITLE: ***Never Quite Tough Enough***

TYPE: Detective Story à la **Black Mask**

LOCALE: Pennsylvania

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A good cop never manages to get tough enough to keep things from getting to him, and stinging the few soft parts he has left inside . . .*

BANNING KNEW HOW IT WAS WITH me, knew I couldn't get the dead face of the Miller kid out of my mind. It was he who talked me into taking two weeks off in the spring.

I had taken my time packing; so, well after dark, I was roaring up Route 14 north out of Williamsport, my hands light and easy on the wheel of Banning's car. Mine was in the shop and he had insisted.

There was one of those Pennsylvania fogs. It was just heavy enough so that I didn't dare pass the car ahead of me, and was content to cruise along just far enough behind him so that his twin taillights made a red glow on the fog that tore by in shreds from the breeze of his fast travel.

It was hypnotic, driving behind the other car, and, as I drove, I thought back over the last ten years and wondered why I had become a cop. Lots of security, sure, but damn low pay. And you never manage to get tough enough to keep things from getting to you, from getting down through your thickened hide and stinging the few soft parts you had left.

I thought of the Miller kid and of the hammer murders in the shanty down by the river, and the gray, bloated look of the bodies that came out of the river. Violence. Diseases of the mind. Shifty eyes. A thousand lineups. You walk into small, dingy sitting rooms and you can smell the blood in the air

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and hear a woman moaning. It's a dirty business: Thankless.

The guy ahead of me had Pennsy plates. I was looking ahead to Jack Farner's lodge in the hills where I could sleep twenty hours a day and eat like a horse and come back to life.

A few miles north of Roaring Branch, Mr. Buick ahead of me slowed down and I dropped back, figuring he was about to turn. A light rain had started, cutting the fog, and his tail-lights were clearer. The road made a gradual bend to the right. He had dropped down to about forty. I held back, waiting for him to let me know what he was going to do.

He went part way around the turn, and the tires on the right side dropped off onto the wet shoulder. I braked, realizing that he'd have to slow down to get back onto the road. He didn't. He kept on going, right across the shoulder and the right front of the big car smashed into a mammoth tree with a noise like a million bricks falling into a greenhouse. The smash threw the big car onto its side and it slid forty feet in the mud, wheels turning in the air.

I jammed on my brakes and fought to get Banning's coupe out of a long skid. I pulled off onto the shoulder a hundred or so feet beyond the smashup and ran back through the rain, a flashlight in my hand.

The rain pattered on the black metal of the car. The front end was a complete mess. There was no sound. The door stuck. I managed to yank it open and pry it back. I climbed up and flashed the light down in there.

A man moaned. He was at the bottom of the heap. A bleeding woman was across him. The fresh blood matted her light hair. I bent down through the open door and felt for her wet arm. No pulse.

I flashed the light on her face. It was impossible to tell what she had looked like, but when I saw the depressed fracture of the frontal lobe, the pale, shell-like bones of the temple protruding through the skin, I knew there was no use in fooling with her. I pulled up hard on her arm, got her body up through the door, and put it on the grass.

The man's face was covered with blood. His mouth opened as I held the light on him and he moaned again. Ambulance business.

I crawled in with him, hearing the glass of the window on his side crack as I stepped on it. I checked him over to make certain he wasn't bleeding to death. No big holes in him that I could find.

Another car stopped. I climbed out, sent them down to the gas station to phone for an ambulance and the highway patrol. I handed the kid driving the car a buck and told him to bring back a couple of red flares.

He jumped the car away like a

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scared rabbit. I flashed my light back on the wreck. The guy was slowly climbing up out of the door I had propped open. I ran to him and steadied him as he climbed down.

His eyes were very wide and he was saying hoarsely, "Sleepy. Fell asleep."

I found a blanket in the back of his car and wrapped him in it and made him sit down, leaning against the bole of the tree he had hit. There was a big gouge in the bark and the white wood underneath was ragged and splintered.

Another car stopped and a man hollered out the window, "Trouble?"

"All under control, unless you're a doctor. Are you?"

"No."

He started to climb out. I said, "Run along, friend." He got back in, slammed the door and drove off.

The kid I had sent to the gas station came back and told me he had put the call through. He had a flashlight. He stared at the dead woman while I set the flares out on the shoulder.

When I got back to the man he said, "Janet! Where's Janet?"

He tried to get up. I put my hands on his shoulders and held him down. "Relax. She's hurt bad. A doctor'll be along in a minute."

Sirens growled in the distance, singing over the hills and around the curves. They bounced to a stop on the shoulder. Two of the Pennsy state cops, young, blunt, and efficient. They gave the woman one look and turned to the man.

At their request he tugged his wallet out of his pocket and handed it to them. One flashed his light on the license and papers while I explained what I had seen and what I had done. The other looked the car over, got a camera and flash bulbs out of his car, and took pictures of the tracks in the mud, the scar on the tree, the overturned car.

The ambulance pulled over close to the tree, right through the shallow ditch beyond the shoulder.

The man was moaning again. They got a stretcher and made him stretch out on it. The intern went over him with quick, careful hands. More cars stopped. People got out, their eyes big with curiosity.

They carted the woman into the ambulance and one trooper told me to report to the barracks near Canton while they got a formal statement from me.

I sat in the small front room of the trooper station after the questions were finished. They had, of course, learned that I was one of the brotherhood, and, after a drink, they asked me to stay overnight; one of the troopers was on leave and I could use his bed. I was too tired to object.

In a short while the younger one of the two, named Sid Graydon, came back from the hospital in

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Canton. He tossed his hat on the hall table, came into the room, and sat down wearily.

The older one, Charlie Hopper, asked, "Get much, Sid?"

"Not a hell of a lot, Charlie. They gave him a drug to quiet him. He isn't hurt. Just shock and being shaken up. A fool nurse told him his wife is dead. He cried like a baby. Damn fool to drive while he was sleepy."

"Where's he from?"

"Philadelphia. Upper Darby to be exact. He and his wife were driving up to Elmira to visit her cousin there. His name is Walker Drock. He's a broker. Just another statistic to write up, Charlie. Nothing to pin on the guy. His wife's death is enough punishment for him."

Charlie sighed. "Probably both of them were asleep. According to the coroner, she didn't even get her hands up in front of her face. Just slammed her face right into the dashboard beside the glove compartment. Dented it right in. Funny about him slowing down. Usually they speed up when they fall asleep."

"Foot probably slid off the gas. By the way, Charlie, I've got to call Kell's garage in the morning and tell them not to touch the car. Drock was insistent about that. He told me that about four times."

"That's funny."

"No, these accident cases, they get an idea in their head and you can't get it out. He probably heard about some guy who had his car towed away by the police and then got a couple of hundred-dollar repair bill. I don't think anybody is going to do much repairing on that crate."

They gave me another drink and I sat with them and talked about the homicide cases in Philadelphia. I didn't tell them about the Miller kid. I won't be able to talk about that case for quite a while.

In the morning I drove on to Jack Farner's place, and spent two long weeks there. I put ten pounds back on and got a little tanned in the sun and cut Jack enough stove wood to last him for six months. The calluses on my palms felt good and the new strength in my shoulders felt even better.

I stopped off to see Charlie and Sid on the way back. Charlie told me that Drock had stayed in the hospital for two days and then had gone back to Philly with the body of his wife. The car had been counted out as a total loss, and sold for salvage value. The thing was open and shut. A simple, tragic accident.

And yet, somehow, it bothered me. Curiosity is an occupational disease with a cop, I suppose. I still couldn't figure out why Drock had slowed down before hitting the tree, why the jar of going off the pavement hadn't awakened him,

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why he was so insistent on the car not being touched.

Banning is the guy who taught me the cop business. Banning says to always assume the worst and work a case from that end. It was none of my business. And it was silly. If you want to kill your wife, and you drive your car head on into a tree, you'll probably end up knocking yourself off, too.

It bothered me and I know how I'm put together. I have to follow every little thing up or I can't sleep nights. Maybe that's why I'm a cop.

I drove to Kell's garage. A guy climbed out from under a car and looked at the records and told me that the Drock car had been sold to an outfit named Higgins and Rigo.

Higgins was a puffy little man with watery eyes and a soiled shirt. He gave me the busy-man routine and I flashed the badge and watched him become very affable. He left me alone with a boy named Joe Baydle who had pulled the Drock car apart.

Joe acted very nervous until he found out that I wasn't interested in him. He leaned against the bench and said, "Anything funny about that Drock car? What do you mean?"

"I don't know what I mean. You've got to help me, Joe. I don't know what I'm looking for. They told me over at Kell's garage that Drock had got his stuff out of the car while it was there, and that he had brought a suitcase to carry off tools and things in."

"He must have had a hell of a lot of tools."

"How so?"

"The crate hasn't been sent to the bailer yet. It's still out in the back. Come along and I'll show you."

It was barely recognizable as the same car I had followed on that dark foggy night. It had been stripped.

Joe yanked the front door open on the driver's side and said, "Look here."

I bent over and looked where he pointed. The car was a four-door and a wide special compartment had been built under the front seat with a drop door that would open right under the driver's thighs.

I borrowed a flashlight and stretched out so I could look in there. It was empty. At first I thought there was no clue to what it had contained. Then I noticed a small fragment caught in a front corner. I pulled it out.

It looked to me like a piece of sponge. I showed it to Joe. He shrugged and I put it in my pocket.

The nurse at the hospital, a pretty little thing with a turned-up nose and wide, wise Irish eyes, said, "Yes, I took care of Mr. Drock. He was very upset about his wife."

"Did he make any phone calls?"

"Why, yes, he did. The morning after he came in here. He called the garage where his car had been towed and told them not to touch

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the car or anything in it until he had seen it. He called his wife's parents and her sister and her cousin in Elmira. He sent a few wires."

"Was he hurt badly?"

"No, he was very lucky. He didn't even get badly bruised. Just shock."

"How do you tell about shock?"

"The patient perspires a great deal, losing the body fluids from the pores. That fluid has to be replaced. Plasma."

"Did they use that on him?"

"No. Dr. Flanagan said that it wasn't a bad case of shock and just to keep him warm and give him a lot of fluids to drink."

"Thanks a lot, nurse. You've given me the information I want."

"You're quite welcome."

Banning drummed his fingers on the desk top. "It's wild geese you're after, Tom. I can give you one explanation. You say he's a broker. Well, for some reason he was carrying some negotiable securities and he had them hidden in that compartment."

"Ed, all I want is your permission to work on it for a couple of days."

"Go ahead, Tom. Go right ahead. Get the doubts out of your thick skull so you can come back to work. The couple of days, my boy, will be leave without pay."

"So be it."

The little green house in Upper Darby had a "For Sale" sign on it. Walker Drock had moved down to an inexpensive apartment hotel on Chestnut.

I picked him up the first night he left the office and followed him to his apartment hotel. I waited up the street and he came out in different clothes an hour later. He went to a cocktail bar on Woodland and fifteen minutes after he arrived, a good-looking blonde joined him.

They got pleasantly tight and then went up and took a room at a cheap hotel on Market near Thirty-eighth. He left her there at dawn and I let him go. She came out at quarter to eleven and walked two blocks toward town before she found a breakfast spot.

She sat at the counter and I went in and sat beside her, in spite of the empty stools on both sides of us. In the mirror I saw her give me a long, skeptical look while she ordered a big breakfast. She was the type who always have trouble with citizens trying to pick her up. A long lean girl with abundant curves in the right places, pale, go-to-hell eyes, and a wide, heavy mouth.

I didn't say a word until she had her coffee cup to her lips. Then I said, "Known Walker Drock long?"

She sputtered and the coffee ran down her chin and she sponged it off with a paper napkin.

"Who the hell are you?" she snapped.

"Just a cop, honey. A plain, dumb

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cop. Known Walker Drock long?"

"For a year. What's it to you?"

"Mrs. Drock didn't like Walker Drock knowing you, did she?"

"She didn't know—" She stopped suddenly. "What's this all about?"

"All about the sad and untimely death of Mrs. Drock. Very unfortunate, wasn't it? Or maybe fortunate. Depends on how you look at things."

"Mister, if you want to know anything, talk to my husband. His name happens to be Walker Drock."

"Sure and husband and wife sneak off to a cheap hotel. That sounds good."

"You think so? It happens that Walker has a certain position to maintain and it wouldn't look right if he married too soon after his wife's death. So we were married secretly in Maryland, and after a decent period we'll be married all over again."

I could tell she wasn't lying.

I said, "You'll have a great future, honey. You can wait for him to get tired of you and get chummy with some other gal. Then he'll kill you the same way he killed his first wife."

That was a shock to her. Her eyes widened and her hands shook. She glanced nervously at the counterman standing ten feet away. She said hoarsely, "You're mad! It was an accident. Walker was in it, too! He could have been killed."

"Could he? Suppose you ask Walker."

I turned away from the look in her eyes. I threw a dime on the counter for my coffee and walked out.

I used the badge on the resident manager of Drock's apartment hotel and got myself a room across the hall from his door. I propped the door open a crack so that I could watch his door.

I had nothing to go on. Just a hunch.

I didn't have a long wait. She probably met him for lunch. He came storming in at two o'clock. He looked down the hall behind him as he fumbled with the key. His face was white.

He went on in. I gave him three minutes. Then I took the passkey and let myself in. He was bending over the fireplace. I slammed the door behind me. As he spun around, his mouth open, I said, "Hot day for a fire, isn't it?"

You're got to give him credit for spunk. He rushed me. I rolled away from his punch, feeling the wind of it on my cheek. I dug a left hook deep into his gut and crossed a right to his face as he bent over.

He dropped on his back and was still. I dragged the smoldering, stinking mess out of the fireplace and stamped on it until it no longer smoked.

I sat on the other side of Banning's desk. He tapped his fingers

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on the edge of the desk and said softly, "I'll be damned!"

"Yeah, he got tied up with this Miss Eletha Forrest and his wife didn't like it a bit. She wouldn't give him a divorce. He planned it nicely. What he forgot to do was to get rid of the gimmick while he had a chance. But I suppose it wasn't too easy to get rid of, at that.

"He waited until another car was following him, and then he picked out a deserted locality. His wife had gone to sleep. That was essential. He had to slow down to about forty going off the road, and probably had it down to thirty-five when he hit the tree.

"He hadn't figured on it tipping over. That made it tougher for him, but he managed. I was the sucker witness—to tell people that he was in the car when it happened. He came out babbling about having fallen asleep, you remember.

"As soon as he had the general locality selected, he reached down and got the gimmick—the big thick sheet of sponge rubber out of the compartment—and kept it ready by his feet. He slowed down to forty, and as he headed for the tree he yanked it up between him and the steering wheel, leaning hard against it to kill the shock. The nurse said he didn't even get badly bruised.

"His wife was asleep. The smash into the tree threw her against the dashboard with killing force. The car turned over. He had a few minutes to wedge the sponge rubber matting back into the compartment under the seat. That's why he didn't want anybody poking around the car.

"He had read that people get killed when they hit unyielding surfaces. He made sure he had one with some give to it, and he probably realized that he had to force himself to relax against it. She had no protection at all."

I found the tall blonde signing her statement. She looked up and saw me, and her lip curled. "You fixed everybody good—real good," she said.

"I can't help that. Isn't it better to know?"

Her eyes were puffy and red. "I suppose so. I hate him, now. I hate him!"

"Come along and I'll buy you a drink."

She looked into my eyes and I saw that there was something about her that I hadn't seen. A sort of integrity. She said, "I hate him, but I'm married to him. I'll stick around and do what I can for him until the State of Pennsylvania electrocutes him. Maybe some day you can buy me that drink."

I walked out, remembering the look in her eyes, adding it to the looks in other eyes, the expressions on other faces.

A cop never grows a hide that's quite tough enough. You always end up hating yourself, too.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	JANE SPEED
TITLE:	*As the Wheel Turns*
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	Vermont
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*In her own way, Paula was a patron of the arts; and she was willing to prove it—in her own peculiar way . . .*

PAULA THORPE DRANK THREE CUPS of coffee, slowly, without being interrupted by so much as a glance from her two breakfast companions. There they sat, the pair of them: Howard, her husband of six months, poring over *Art Treasures of Ancient Syria;* and his mother, a fat little mountain of a woman squeezed into a wheel chair, applying herself assiduously to the one pursuit which fully engaged her interest—eating.

Paula slammed her empty cup down into its saucer. Mother Thorpe lifted her head at the sound like a startled rabbit and hastily snatched the last blueberry muffin from the bun warmer. Howard merely shifted in his chair and murmured, without looking up, "Excellent breakfast, my dear."

Paula sighed, gathered up a stack of dishes, and carried them out to the kitchen.

From earliest memory Paula had yearned for the company of artists. She had not been able to coax forth any noticeable talent of her own, so she had set her sights on what seemed the next best means of entry into the charmed circle—to be the guiding genius of some creative spirit.

And then, at a cocktail party last fall, she met Howard Thorpe. His gaunt, tousle-haired good looks and his habit of protracted, brooding silences made him appear a romantic figure of Byronic proportions. And when Paula learned that his field was art (he "earned his bread and butter" by teaching art at a small New England college) and that he was in New York to discuss the possible publication

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of a book he was working on, she could hardly be blamed for feeling that here indeed was the embodiment of the chance she'd been looking for.

They were married quietly in New York the day after Thanksgiving and set out immediately for his home in Vermont. Howard's teaching schedule and his modest Assistant Professor's salary precluded any honeymoon, but Paula didn't mind in the least. She had embarked on this marriage willing, even eager, to starve in a garret (or the small college-town equivalent) for the sake of her very own struggling artist.

She had plunged with fanatical zeal into her new role. His mother's welfare seemed a matter of prime importance with Howard, therefore it became so with Paula, too. Great plans were afoot for the celebration of the good lady's sixty-fifth birthday which was to occur late in the spring, and Paula fell in with these plans enthusiastically, adding many small refinements of her own to make the occasion more festive.

And every clear day since the first real thaw she had dutifully pushed Mother Thorpe in her rickety wheel chair to the fat little woman's favorite spot, the top of a steep rise which commanded an impressive view of the neat, stone-walled campus. Here, beneath the shade of an ancient elm, Paula, who didn't trust the brake on the venerable contraption, carefully settled one wheel of the chair into a rut. Then she sat patiently while the old woman droned on and on until she finally talked herself into her morning nap.

Mother Thorpe was touched by Paula's devotion and often in her rambling monologues she reiterated her regret that she couldn't do more for her dear Howard and his dear wife. Howard's father, she would explain vaguely, though a dear man, had been a bit of an eccentric and had tied up his sizeable fortune in a complicated trust fund which she herself didn't altogether understand.

"But never you mind, dear," went her favorite refrain as she patted Paula's shoulder with her pudgy hand, "you shall have it all one day, and soon."

But the days dragged into weeks and the weeks into months, and Paula found herself pinning her hopes increasingly on her mother-in-law's words. For the harsh truth was, there was very little else to pin them on.

It had by this time become painfully clear that the perpetual frown which drew Howard's brows down at his nose in such a devilishly attractive way was not a sign of the outrage of a gifted rebel but of a mildly fussy disposition; he was essentially a silent man for the simple reason that he had very little to say; and his teaching of art history at this small college was not a means

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to the end of being recognized in his field, but rather an end in itself. In short, Howard was not an artist, but a schoolmaster.

And the book? Paula had clung to this long after her other illusions about Howard were dashed. True, it was to be a scholarly text, hardly destined for a place on the best-seller lists. Still Paula had rather counted on being able to refer casually to "Howard's book" when she wrote to her friends back in New York. But just yesterday had come a letter from the publisher informing Howard that another house was bringing out a work on substantially the same subject and therefore it would be inadvisable to go ahead with the tentatively proposed publication. So even that satisfaction was to be denied her.

"Well, dear," said Howard, appearing at the kitchen door, "I'm off to the wars." Paula offered her cheek for his husbandly peck—and waited. Without fail, he added, "Lovely day." And then, as though a bright new thought had just occurred to him, "Why don't you take Mother up to the hill this morning?"

But you know I take her every day, Paula opened her mouth to protest. Then she closed it. What was the use? He'd say the same thing tomorrow anyhow. She merely nodded silently and went on with the dishes.

Half an hour later she was trundling the old lady up the hill. She settled the chair into its accustomed place and flung herself down on the ground nearby. The view of the well-trimmed campus surrounded by its stone wall seemed to Paula like nothing so much as a neat, orderly trap. She paid even less attention than usual to her mother-in-law's monotonous prattle, catching only, "You shall have it all one day, and soon."

The familiar words made Paula ache with restless longing. If only "soon" could be right now. Money, she had always piously maintained, wasn't important; and yet, when one had nothing else—

With enough money she could pry Howard out of his narrow little life; a year in Paris, then perhaps Rome; maybe they could finally live in Switzerland as so many people were doing. It just might make all the difference. There might still be some hidden spark to be struck in Howard if only he could be freed from the deadening influence of this dismal town and its suffocating college.

A gentle snoring from the wheel chair brought Paula rudely back to reality. Not a chance, she thought bitterly. The famous sixty-fifth birthday was only a week away, and the old woman, sleeping peacefully in the shade, looked fit for another fifteen years at least. Oh, it just wasn't fair!

Paula yanked her sleep-numbed leg out from under her and extended it sharply. Her foot accidentally

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struck the wheel of the chair. She gasped as the chair, loosened from its place, rolled forward a few feet and came to a stop precariously near the beginning of the long downward slope.

For a few seconds Paula sat rigid, hardly able to breathe. And through it all, like an idiotically benign counterpoint, the snoring continued unbroken. The old woman apparently slept as wholeheartedly as she ate. Paula relaxed at last, exhausted from fear. What a close call!

And then, insidiously, a second thought crept into her consciousness. How *easy* it had been. Almost before she realized what was happening, Paula found herself sliding forward along the ground. She stretched her leg out cautiously, and with her foot gave the chair another shove. It moved only a few inches this time and then held, caught by a rut at the very edge.

Again Paula waited, her heart pounding. And again there was no sound except the snoring, and no movement from the woman in the wheel chair.

Paula rose silently. She seemed to have lost all sense of what it was she was trying to do and was filled only with a determination to accomplish it. She grasped the back of the chair with both hands. Gently she eased the front wheels and then the back ones over the obstructing spot. Then with a strong thrust she sent the chair forward.

It started down the grade slowly, then gained momentum. The fat little woman, squeezed in so tightly, didn't even waken fully enough to cry out. There was scarcely any sound at all till the distant, splintering thud as the chair with its heavy passenger crashed into the solid stone wall . . .

It was more than three hours later when Howard finally came out of his mother's room. Paula, sitting in the hall outside, knew by his face that the old woman was dead. The tension in which Paula had spent the intervening hours broke suddenly and she gave way to hysterical sobbing.

"Oh, dear," murmured Howard, distressed. He came to her quickly and sat beside her. "Paula, you mustn't . . . Don't blame yourself, my dear. It was a dreadful accident, that's all." Then, as her sobbing continued unabated, he went on nervously. "Please, dear, try to look at it this way. These last few months have been the happiest Mother has ever known, thanks largely to you. Really, she remarked many times about your great kindness to her."

Paula buried her face even deeper in her hands to hide the blush that flared up in her cheeks. It was several painful minutes before she could control her sobs enough to mumble, "She didn't even get to have her birthday party."

"That's true," said Howard with

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a sad smile. "Poor Mother. That would be her only regret, I think. She had so counted on being able to turn over Father's money to us."

Paula lifted her head at this and stared at Howard through a blur of tears. "What do you mean?" she asked finally.

"Why—didn't Mother explain to you about Father's will?"

"Not—very clearly," Paula managed to say. Her mouth felt dry.

"Well," Howard began, settling comfortably into his classroom manner, "although Father became quite a wealthy man in his lifetime, he always retained a strong Yankee fear of the corrupting influence of money not earned. He felt that Mother spoiled me and that if he left the money to her outright she'd turn it over to me immediately and I'd become a wastrel. And he may have been right, you know. Dear Mother, she found it very hard to deny me anything. At any rate, Father made out a will leaving the money in trust, allowing Mother only a monthly income until she should reach the age of sixty-five."

"Sixty-five?" Paula echoed stupidly.

"I don't know why sixty-five exactly. Perhaps he felt that by that time I'd be forty and have acquired the habit of earning my own keep."

"But—" Paula was struggling to make sense of Howard's words. "But how could he be sure she'd live to be sixty-five?"

"He couldn't, of course. And," he added with a sigh, "as it turned out, she didn't."

Paula closed her eyes. She could hardly bring herself to ask it. "What—what happens to the money now?"

"Oh—that." Howard frowned in an effort to recall the exact wording. "In the event of her death before attaining the age of sixty-five," he recited with maddening accuracy, "the money automatically goes to the college." Here he permitted himself a dignified chuckle. "Like so many people with very little formal schooling, Father had the greatest respect for institutions of higher learning."

Up to this point Howard had fastidiously avoided looking directly at his wife, on the charitable assumption that her initial excessive outburst had been as embarrassing to her as it was to him. As he turned to face her now, he was shocked to see the crushing effect his words had been having on her.

"Oh, my dear Paula," he hastened to reassure her. "Surely you don't think I mind about the money? How can I miss something I've never had? We lived very frugally even when Father was alive. Why, I have my work, a good wife, our little home—what more could I possibly want? You'll see, my dear, our life will go on quite as usual. Except that poor Mother is no longer with us, nothing has changed at all."

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The murder occurred right before Guy Moran Caine's eyes and instantly it brought dire peril to the beautiful girl with whom Guy had fallen in love at first sight . . .

HOCUS-POCUS AT DRUMIS TREE

by HANDON C. JORRICKS

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A WEEK Guy Moran Caine wasn't marveling at finding himself in London. Instead, he was marveling at a young lady. She was one of a party at the next table at the Drumis Tree, a restaurant which the guidebook had rightfully told Guy he would find delightful—though it could hardly have anticipated his reasons.

The young American couldn't have said why he found so enchanting someone he didn't even know, but there it was. In addition to a vibrant beauty which reached him all too clearly at the next table, there was something in her smile, both warm and exciting, that made him feel he simply had to meet her.

He was not so approving of her behavior toward the good-looking young man on her left, a behavior which seemed altogether too friendly. It was no part of Guy's rapidly forming dream that she should be in love with someone else. He observed them toast each other with the wine that the waiter had just poured—champagne, Guy thought it was. They put their heads together for a moment, and then exchanged glasses.

The girl had barely sipped hers when she gasped and stared, horrified, at her companion. He had slumped over the table, oddly inert.

As Guy watched, a little man with a goatee and a fussy manner rose from his place at the young man's left and bent over him. He seemed to study the young man closely, then he straightened and said something in a low voice to the other three people at the table.

Guy, who was frankly straining his ears, caught the words *dead, poison,* and *police*. Then the little man gave the girl a queer look and said something that Guy couldn't catch at all, but her color drained completely.

The others at the table—an immoderately gorgeous woman and a rather nondescript, rumpled-looking man—were staring at his beloved in a way Guy didn't care for. They edged away from her and huddled at the other side of the table.

Guy felt his blood boil. Without stopping to think, he stormed over

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to the neighboring table. "Look here," he blurted out to her, ignoring the others, "let me help. You must think I'm crazy," he added, "but I can see there's trouble and you need someone to stand by you."

"Galahad and the damsel in distress," murmured the little man in a suave voice, tinged with a foreign accent. "My dear sir, I think we can handle our own affairs without help from a total stranger," and turning to the girl he said pointedly, "Can't we, Melissa, my dear?"

She hesitated, then flung up her head. "No," she said clearly and firmly. "I don't know who he is, but it's good of him, and perhaps some objectivity is just what we *do* need."

She turned to Guy, who refrained from pointing out that objectivity was not what he was offering. "I'm awfully grateful. I'm Melissa St. Dinserd, and this"—indicating the little man with the goatee—"is my guardian, M. Druerre. Over there is Ramora Glussot, and her agent, Herr Girden. There's been talk all week about their making a movie together—my guardian to finance it, and Ramora to star. They want—wanted—" She broke off and looked at the dead man, "They wanted *him* to be in it too."

Ramora Glussot! No wonder the other woman seemed more gorgeous than life—she was *the* glamorous star of French films. He could only put down his initial lack of recognition to the magic of Melissa, which for Guy obscured all else.

He told Melissa his name, still ignoring the others beyond a curt nod when they were introduced, and steered her to his own table.

"What kind of friends and guardian have you?" he demanded. "It looked as if they were accusing you of murder."

It never entered his bewitched head that she might in fact be a murderess. Even when he had been a table away, he had felt that she radiated honesty and decency, along with her other more physical qualities.

"I'd better explain," she said, biting her entrancing lower lip. "I can't blame them for wondering. He—the d-d-dead man—is—was—Peter Osch. He seems to have been poisoned—in the champagne, the glass smells of it—and we had just switched glasses. Besides, his glass was between him and me. No one else could have given him poison. They think I doctored my glass and then asked him to change, but actually it was he who suggested changing glasses. I don't see how it was done, but I certainly didn't do it."

"Of course not," Guy said with such heat that she stared at him, and a flush crept along her cheeks. "He must have taken it himself."

"But it doesn't make sense," she frowned. "He's not the suicidal type, I'm sure. Anyhow, I used to

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know him rather well (Guy winced) and we talked sometimes about suicide—in the idle way one does, what methods one would or wouldn't use. He always said poison was not for him—he knew too many instances of people who'd been pulled through."

For some time Guy had been disturbed by the vague sensation of people hovering about them, a sensation enhanced, now that he came to think of it, by the odor of an evil-smelling pipe. This was now followed by a low but penetrating rumble that would have done credit to the foghorn of a transatlantic liner.

"Lordloveaduck," this voice thundered, "who in blue blazes are you?"

Guy's glance reluctantly left the girl and traveled upward. It alighted first on the companion of the speaker, a mild, stolid-looking man carrying a neat bowler. Next, his gaze went to the speaker himself, lingering in fascinated and delighted disbelief. He took in the bald head, the prominent abdomen, the disreputable suit, the whole improbably-put-together and fiercely scowling individual whom (next to Melissa, of course) he most wanted to meet in all England—and certainly at this moment most urgently needed.

"You're Sir Marvin Rhyerlee!" he exclaimed. "My father raised me on tales of you—and I always thought he was exaggerating. (In spite of the tension, he couldn't help smiling.) You're the man who solves impossible problems. Well, there's an impossible murder right here."

"Well. Now." The gentleman in question allowed himself to be mollified. "I'm the Old Man, all right. I'm the one they come to when they're stuck, and laugh at the rest of the time. Even you, son, I saw it! But burn me," he roared, his wrath returning, "what's going on here, and why can't I have a peaceable lunch like any peaceable citizen, without something always going wrong?"

"Peaceable" was somehow the last word Guy would have used in connection with Sir Marvin Rhyerlee, but he let it pass. Before he knew it, they were all being ushered into a private room—M. Druerre, Herr Girden, and Mlle. Glussot, as well as Melissa and himself. Sir Marvin's luncheon companion turned out to be Inspector Starmes of the C.I.D., who promptly took charge of the investigation.

When they were comfortably settled, Guy explained to Sir Marvin and Starmes how he had become involved. A reminiscent chuckle rumbled out of Sir Marvin when Guy gave his name. "Sure, son, I remember your dad. Those were great times we had in America."

"So he said," Guy commented drily. "But even though I've barged into something that wasn't my business, it looked to me as if this

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crowd was ready to pin a murder on this young lady, just like that. I ask you, sir, does she look like a murderess?"

"We-e-ell," said Rhyerlee, "lotsa murderers don't. Ask Starmes here. Just the same, it's a pretty fast conclusion to jump to. I think," he looked hard at Druerre, "we ought to hear more."

"Of course, m'sieu, of course." The little man with the goatee was all cooperation. "Peter Osch was my ward, as is Melissa St. Dinserd. They are not related to me, nor, for that matter, to each other—otherwise, they could not have been affianced, as they were."

Melissa made a protesting sound, but M. Druerre continued, unheeding. "Young Osch has been in Africa for a few years, and has only been back in England a few days. Today was the great day of his life—when he came of age—and we were celebrating his birthday. But he was out of touch—we were his only acquaintances in England, and he hardly knew Mlle. Glussot and he only met Herr Girden this morning. It would not make sense for them to take his life. But the young lady here—I do not like to say it, but she is of a hot temper, and she sat next to the wine glass. I can only suppose that they had a—what do you call it?—a lover's quarrel."

"Steady, sir," Starmes cut in affably. "The young lady switched drinks with the gentlemen, didn't she? Just so. Didn't it occur to you that perhaps someone might have been trying to poison *her,* and because of a romantic notion of the young man's, the murderer got the wrong victim?"

A strangled sound came from Melissa. "Murder me!" Her voice had a queer pitch, but she spoke steadily enough. "Oh, no! But for the record," she flashed in a different tone, "I was *not* engaged to him. (Guy felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his chest.) We once had some sort of childhood notion, but it was never definite, and we hadn't seen each other for a long time. As you heard, he's only been back in this country a few days. I am quite heartwhole and fancy free," she added firmly, and Guy almost stood up and danced a jig.

"But, mademoiselle," purred Mlle. Glussot, "he did *want* to marry you, did he not? *Le pauvre enfant* told me all about you when we met this noon, and he had such high hopes." Her eyes were twinkling. "Do you know what he told me? That my friend had actually given him a drug that would make you fall in love with him."

"Miss Glussot!" Starmes couldn't contain himself. "Do you expect us to believe that?"

"*Cherie,* you must have misunderstood," M. Druerre added suavely.

The famous movie star shrugged her beautiful shoulders. "That is

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what he said. An imaginative type —that young man."

"It's just possible," said Melissa thoughtfully. "He believed in all kinds of crazy nonsense—black magic, voodoo, things like that. Give anyone a little time to win his confidence, and they could probably make him believe anything."

"But why?" Starmes asked. "Herr Girden, you have a bizarre sense of humor."

"Ach, nein!" came the angry protest. "I did no such thing. Ramora, where did you get such a crazy idea?"

Guy's wits had sharpened remarkably when Melissa had said she was fancy free, and suddenly he had a brainstorm. "Look here," he said, unaware that he was shouting, "the guilty person must be this German chap. If Miss St. Dinserd was the intended victim, Girden might have handed Osch a poison to give to her under pretense of this claptrap. He was sitting next to her —on her other side—so he might even have done it himself. Maybe," he added wildly, "it's a plot between the beautiful Frenchwoman and the sinister German. One of them's lying about this love potion business—that we know."

"Looky here, son." Rhyerlee took Guy aside. "Girden didn't put poison in the gal's glass. Fact is," he muttered, "Starmes and I had our eyes on Girden for other reasons. That's why we were here —Starmes wanted me to get a look at him. We never took our eyes off him, and I personally can vouch for the fact that he put nothing in any drink. Besides, Starmes has had him tailed all week, and it's true that he never met the boy until this morning."

"Wait," said Guy, "I've got it. We only have M. Druerre's word that the poison was in the drink. Maybe it was in the food—and he poisoned the drink later to confuse the trail. Or maybe Osch took vitamins and they were doctored."

"Say, son," Sir Marvin boomed, "you got possibilities."

Starmes was listening with one ear while he received a report from one of his men with the other. Dismissing his man, he said, "Clever, all right. But Osch didn't take pills —none were found on him, nor a container. My man just told me. And besides, the food doesn't smell of cyanide, which it looks like he died of—but the drink does. We'll have to wait for medical and laboratory reports to be certain, but unofficially I'd stake my shirt on it that he was poisoned in the champagne. And that," he added, "seems to wash out all the possibilities."

Starmes turned to Marvin Rhyerlee. "Unless, sir, you can think of something?"

The sweetly polite question was not without irony, born of long and frustrating experience. The Old Man was a master at providing explanations in situations where Star-

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mes could have sworn that no explanations were possible.

"Why, sure, son." Rhyerlee was doing it again. "Meantersay you haven't tumbled to it? I don't know how you're going to pin it on him, but here's your man." And he pointed M. Druerre.

"This is an outrage!" The Frenchman was furious. "Why should I kill Miss St. Dinserd?"

"Won't wash, son." Rhyerlee sounded tired. "You don't hocus me with that one. It ain't Miss St. Dinserd who's dead. It's Peter Osch, and that's just who you meant it to be. As to why— I daresay you've been monkeying with the young man's estate while he was too far away in Africa to know about it. Maybe that's how you raised the money to finance a movie for this particularly expensive star. Starmes can find out easy enough. I expect you felt threatened with exposure when Osch came back *and* became of age to manage his own affairs."

"Yes, you will find out," said Druerre, who seemed suddenly to have lost a lot of his bustle. "But I couldn't have killed my ward. I was nowhere near his glass."

"That was the diabolically clever part," Sir Marvin admitted. "You got the boy to commit his own murder. Mlle. Glussot's 'friend,' who sold him a lot of bunkum about a love drug, was you. And you also gave Osch something to take himself, didn't you?—'to be equal to the flaming love of his sweetheart.' And of course you suggested that he switch glasses, so he could dope 'em both—so that we would get on another wrong track, if we didn't fall for Miss St. Dinserd as the murderess. Only it wasn't a love drug, of course. What you gave him for Miss St. Dinserd was harmless, but for himself it was poison."

Druerre sagged, but he made a final effort. "*If* you are right about the method, Melissa, or even Ramora or Girden, could have done it."

"That's where you're wrong, son," said Sir Marvin. "Aside from the fact that your motive sticks out a mile, the gal couldn't have spun him that moonshine about a love potion to affect *her*. As for Herr Girden, he only met him this morning—so there's no motive—and if it weren't for Mademoiselle we'd never have known about the drug. She wouldn't have told us if she'd killed him, and there's no other way he *could* have been killed.

"And that ain't quite all, son," M.R. finished quietly. "That monicker of yours labels you the murderer anyhow."

EDITORS' NOTE: Yes, as M.R. said, M. Druerre's monicker labels him the murderer . . . For once again the author, whose real name is Mrs. Norma Schier, is up to her ana-

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grammatical tricks. Once again she has converted every proper name in the story (except London and England) into an anagram. To wit:

M. Druerre = murderer
Guy Moran Caine = young American
Melissa St. Dinserd = damsel in distress
Peter Osch = the corpse
Ramora Glussot = glamorous star
Herr Girden = red herring (a cute one!)
Drumis Tree = murder site
Starmes = (Chief Inspector) Masters (of the C.I.D.)
Marvin Rhyerlee = Henry Merrivale

And the supposed author's name—Handon C. Jorricks (a wonderful anagram!)—is of course (to quote from Mrs. Schier's note) "the Old Man's creator, master of the impossible situation, and a far wilier plotter than my anagrammatic 'pastiche' does justice to—none other than John Dickson Carr."

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To Colonel March, head of the Department of Queer Complaints, comes another problem "of the impossible": how did the £23,000 in cash disappear, vanish, evaporate in thin air? . . . the first in a special reprint series by one of the great masters of the "impossible crime," the "miracle problem"—in this case, the Mystery of the Invisible Money.

RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

JUST BEFORE CLOSING TIME ON A Tuesday afternoon in December, a saloon car drew up before the St. James's office of the City and Provincial Bank, and four men got out. Lights were burning inside the bank, but the day was raw and murky. Two of the newcomers went to the counter, where they accosted the cashiers with pistol muzzles cradled over their arms. The third, who wore no hat or coat, walked behind the counter, and before anybody knew what he was doing, began quietly drawing the blinds on the windows.

The fourth, who had taken a .45 caliber revolver out of his overcoat pocket, spoke with great clearness.

"You know why we're here," he said. "Just keep quiet and nothing will happen to you."

One of the clerks, a youngster, laughed; and was instantly shot through the chest with a silencered gun.

The noise it made was no louder than that of slapping two cupped palms together, a kind of *thock*. The clerk tumbled sideways, rattling against a desk scales, and they heard his body strike the floor. Then all noise seemed to die away under the bright, hard lights, except the sound of the newcomers' footsteps on the marble floor.

"That's right," said the man who had first spoken. "Just keep quiet and nothing will happen to you."

The thing was incredible; but it was happening. Possibly every man in the bank, now staring in various twisted positions with hands in the air, had seen it happen in a film, and had smiled at it as being confined to another continent. But with great precision the man who had drawn the blinds was now clearing out the safe, transferring what he wanted to a neat leather bag.

Outside bustled the traffic of St. James's; passers-by saw a closed bank, and thought nothing of it.

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By the third minute it had become unbearable. The manager, risking it, ducked under the counter for a gun, and was shot down.

Then the leader of the gang leaned close to a young clerk named John Parrish, and said, "Thanks, kid. You'll get your cut."

Like four well-trained ghosts, the raiders came together and melted out into the street. Their car was away from the curb before the alarm sounded.

Now the robbery of the City and Provincial Bank failed because of one small but important fact. In England you can rob quite easily; you can even, if you do not mind risking the gallows, rob with violence; but you cannot make a getaway afterward.

"Skipper" Morgan, late of Cicero, Illinois, might be excused for not realizing this. But Pudge Henderson, Slugger Dean, and Bill Stein, all of whom knew Dartmoor as the rest of us know our own homes, should have realized it. Possibly they expected the very daring of the raid to bring it off for them, and they changed cars three times before, early that evening, two Flying Squad cars cut them off on the road to Southampton.

Skipper Morgan wanted to shoot it out, and was brought down in a flying tackle which broke his arm. But here the police met a snag: of £23,000 in cash, not one penny was found on the fugitives.

Chief Inspector Ames visited Skipper Morgan that night.

"You're in bad, Skipper," he said pleasantly. "One of those fellows you shot is likely to die. Even if he pulls through, you can reckon on a good long stretch."

The other said nothing, though he looked murderous. It was Ames who had broken his arm.

"I don't say it'd help you," pursued the Chief Inspector, "if you told us what you did with that money. But it might, Skipper. It *might.* And you might tell us whether that young clerk at the bank, the one you said would get his cut, was really in it with you."

"Dirty little rat," said the Skipper, out of pure spite and malice. "Sure he was in it. But I want to see my lawyer; that's what I want."

So they detained John Parrish. To Marjorie Dawson he wrote: *Don't you believe a word of it. Cheer up.*

A solicitor for Morgan was speedily produced. This was none other than Mr. Ireton Bowlder, that aloof gentleman with the aristocratic nose and the wide clientele. Scotland Yard regarded him with disfavor because he never failed to put their backs up.

True, there was little that even Mr. Ireton Bowlder could do for the prisoners; but he contrived to suggest, with a fishy smile and a sad shake of the head, that they would leave the court without a

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stain on their characters. Still the stolen money was not forthcoming.

"It's one of two things, sir," Chief Inspector Ames told the Assistant Commissioner. "They've hidden it, or they've turned it over to a fence."

"A fence for stolen money?"

"And bonds," said Ames. "Nothing easier. Of course we've got the numbers of the notes, fivers and above. But they can easily be disposed of abroad: people are always buying and hoarding English money, and they don't necessarily inquire where it comes from. I know of two fences like that, and I hear there's a third operating who's the biggest in the business. Getting rid of 'hot' money used to be difficult; but it's simple now. It's more than a new kind of racket; it's a new kind of big business. If we could get a line on who's doing this—"

"Any suspicions?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ames promptly. "Ireton Bowlder."

The Assistant Commissioner whistled. "If it only could be!" he said with dreamy relish. "Lord, if it only could be! But be careful, Ames; he's got a lot of influence. And what makes you think it's Bowlder, anyway?"

"It's all underground so far," Ames admitted. "But that's what the boys say. Now, we nabbed Morgan and his mob just outside a village called Crawleigh. Bowlder's got a country house only a mile from there. Bowlder was at his country house on Tuesday night, though as a rule he only goes down week-ends. Skipper Morgan was down there twice the week before the robbery. It doesn't prove anything, but taken with the rest of the rumors—"

"What about the boy Parrish?"

Ames grinned. "Had nothing to do with it, sir. It was Morgan's idea of a joke. I'm convinced of it, and so is the bank. But Parrish might be useful."

Just how useful Chief Inspector Ames did not realize until the following day, when Miss Marjorie Dawson came hurrying up to town.

She was a quiet, fair-haired girl, pretty yet unobtrusive, though now strung up to fighting pitch. Her hazel eyes had a directness of gaze which was as good as a handclasp; she had, even in this difficulty, a sense of humor.

She told the Chief Inspector things which made him swear. But after a half-hour interview it was not to the Assistant Commissioner that Ames took her. He took her to a door on the ground floor labeled: *D3: Colonel March.*

"Colonel March," he said, "let me introduce Miss Marjorie Dawson. Miss Dawson is engaged to be married to young Parrish. She's now employed as secretary to Ireton Bowlder's aunt—"

"Not any longer," said the girl, smiling faintly. "Sacked yesterday."

"And she says Bowlder's got the City and Provincial Bank money."

Colonel March was a large amia-

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ble man with a speckled face, a bland eye, and a large-bowled pipe projecting from under a cropped mustache. He rocked on his heels before the fire, and seemed puzzled.

"I am delighted to hear it," he said formally. "But why come to me? This, Miss Dawson, is the Department of Queer Complaints. Business has been bad lately and I should be very glad to tackle the problem of a blue pig or a ghost in the garden. But if you've landed Ireton, why come to me?"

"Because it's a queer complaint, right enough," said Ames grimly. "What Miss Dawson tells us is impossible."

"Impossible?"

Marjorie Dawson looked from one to the other of them, and drew a deep breath of relief. Color had come back into her face.

"I hope you're being frank with me," she said. She appealed to Colonel March. "Inspector Ames tells me that you haven't really got a case against John Parrish, and don't mean to hold him—"

"No, no; you can have him whenever you want him," said Ames with impatience.

"—but I came up here after somebody's blood," the girl admitted. "You see, the local police wouldn't believe me; and yet it's true, every word of it."

"The money vanished in front of their eyes," said Ames.

"One moment," said Colonel March with an air of refreshed interest. He pushed out chairs for them. "Disappearing money. That is better; that is distinctly better. Tell me about it."

"It was at Greenacres," said the girl, "Mr. Bowlder's country house. As Mr. Ames told you, I'm Miss Bowlder's secretary; she keeps house for her nephew.

"I'm not going to tell you what I felt when I heard about the robbery. The first I knew of it was when I opened the newspaper at the breakfast table on Wednesday, and saw John's name staring up at me—as though he'd committed a murder or something. I couldn't believe it. I knew it was a mistake of some kind. But I thought Mr. Bowlder might know—"

"Might know?" prompted Colonel March.

She hesitated, her forehead puckered. "Well, not that, exactly. I thought he might be able to help me, being a solicitor. Or at least that he would know what to do.

"It was barely half-past eight in the morning. I was the only one up in the house, except servants—Miss Bowlder doesn't get down until nine. Then I remembered that Mr. Bowlder had come to Greenacres the afternoon before, and I could go to him straight away.

"That's how it happened. You see, when Mr. Bowlder is at Greenacres he always has nine-o'clock breakfast with his aunt—very dutiful and all that. Any letters that

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come for him in the morning are always put in his study—which is at the back of the house. Before he goes in to breakfast, he always goes to the study to see if there are any letters. So back I went to the study, to catch him alone before he went to breakfast. I didn't knock; I just opened the door and walked in. And I got such a shock that I thought I must be seeing things.

"The study is a large, rather bare room, with two windows looking out over a terrace. It has recently been painted, by the way, which is rather important. It was a bright, cold, quiet morning; and the sun was pouring in. There is a bust of somebody or other on the mantelpiece, and a big flat-topped desk in the center of the room.

"Of course I hadn't expected to find anybody there. But Mr. Bowlder was sitting at the table, fully dressed. And spread out in rows on the table were at least twenty packets of banknotes of all denominations. Nearly every packet was fastened with a little paper band with *City and Provincial Bank* printed on it.

"I simply stood and stared. My head was full of the City and Provincial Bank. And, anyway, it's not his own bank—the bank he uses, I mean.

"Then Mr. Bowlder turned round and saw me. The sun was behind his head and I didn't get a good view of his face; but all of a sudden his fingers crisped up as though he were going to scratch with them. Then he got up and ran at me. I jumped outside; he slammed the door, and bolted it on the inside."

She paused.

"Go on, Miss Dawson," said Colonel March in a curious voice.

"It takes a long time to tell," she went on rather blankly, "but in a second or two I put together a whole lot of things. Skipper Morgan's gang had been arrested just outside our village; the paper said so. Morgan's picture was in the paper, and I knew I had seen him at Greenacre the week before John had been down there to visit me. I suppose Morgan saw him there, and that's why Morgan made such a very funny joke about John when the bank was robbed. It was all a kind of whirl in my head; but it came together as a dead certainty.

"There is a telephone in the hall just outside Mr. Bowlder's study. I sat down and rang up the local police."

Here she looked at them with some defiance.

"What I was afraid of was that Mr. Bowlder would come out of the room and take the money away and hide it somewhere before the police arrived. I didn't see how I could stop him if he did. But he didn't even come out of the study. That worried me horribly, because the room was as quiet as a grave and I wondered what he might be up to. I like people to *do* something.

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"Then I thought: 'Suppose he got out of a window?' But I remembered something about that. As I told you, the woodwork of that room had been painted only a few days before. It wasn't the best of painting jobs; and as a result both windows were so stuck that it was impossible to open them. Annie had been complaining about it the day before; they were to have been seen to that very day. So when the police arrived—I could hardly believe my good luck—Mr. Bowlder was still in that room with the money.

"It was an Inspector and a Sergeant of the local police. They were on hot bricks, because Mr. Bowlder is an important man; but the Morgan gang had been caught near there and they weren't taking any chances. While I was trying to explain, Mr. Bowlder opened the door of the study. He was as pleasant and sad-faced as ever.

"He said, 'Money? What money?'

"I explained all over again, and I'm afraid I got a bit incoherent about it. But I told them the money was still in the study, because Mr. Bowlder hadn't left it.

"He said—and don't I remember it!—'Gentlemen, this young lady is suffering from optical illusions. At nine o'clock in the morning this is a pity. I am aware that you have no search warrant, Inspector, but you are at liberty to make as thorough a search of this room as you like. How much money was there, Miss Dawson?"

"I said thousands and thousands of pounds: it sounded wrong even as I said it. Mr. Bowler laughed.

"He said, 'Thousands and thousands of pounds, eh? Gentlemen, if you can find any money in this room—apart from a few shillings on my person—I will donate it all to police charities. But there is no money here.'

"And there wasn't. Enough money to fill a suitcase—and yet it wasn't there."

Colonel March frowned. "You mean the police didn't find it?"

"I mean it wasn't there to be found. It had just vanished."

"That's as true as gospel," declared Chief Inspector Ames with vehemence. "I rang them up half an hour ago and talked to Inspector Daniels. Search? They had the whole place to pieces! Bowlder sat and smoked cigarettes and egged them on. They even got an architect in to make certain there were no secret panels anywhere in the room."

"And?"

"There weren't any. There wasn't a hiding place for so much as a pound note, let alone a sackful of the stuff. The point is, what's to be done? I don't think Miss Dawson is lying, but all that money couldn't vanish into thin air. How could it?"

Colonel March was pleased. He relighted his pipe; he rocked on his heels before the fire; then, becom-

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ing conscious of the impropriety, he coughed and tried to conceal the fact that he was pleased.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "But this is the best thing I have encountered since the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin—you recall?—went after the purloined letter. Ahem. Now let us see. We establish that there are no secret panels or other flummery. Windows?"

"Just as Miss Dawson said. The windows were so stuck that two men couldn't move 'em. Nothing could have been taken out of the room that way."

"Fireplace?"

"Bricked up. They don't use it, because the room is centrally heated. Bricks solidly cemented and untouched. No possible hiding place in or round the fireplace."

"Furniture?"

Ames consulted his notebook. "One flat-topped table, one small table, two easy chairs, one straight chair, one bookcase, one standing lamp, one standing ashtray. You can take it for granted that not one of those got away without the closest examination; and nothing was hidden in any of them. Anything to add to that, Miss Dawson?"

Marjorie shook her head. "No. And it wasn't in the carpet or the curtains, or behind the pictures, or in the leaves of the books, or even in the bust I mentioned; not that you could put all that money there, anyway. It just wasn't there." She clenched her hands. "But you do believe me, don't you?"

"Miss Dawson," said Ames slowly, "I don't know. You're certain Bowlder didn't leave the study at any time before the police arrived?"

"Positive."

"He couldn't have slipped out?"

"No. I was in front of the door all the time. It's true, Inspector. What reason would I have for lying to you? It only got me the sack, and it hasn't helped John. I've thought and thought about it. I thought of the trick, too, of hiding a thing by leaving it in plain sight, where nobody notices it. But you certainly couldn't leave the City and Provincial Bank money in plain sight without anybody noticing it."

"Well, it beats me," admitted the Chief Inspector. "But then that's why we're here. It's impossible! Daniels swears there wasn't an inch of that room they didn't go over with a fine-tooth comb. And yet I believe you, because I've got a feeling Bowlder has been too smart for us somehow. Any ideas, Colonel?"

Colonel March sniffed at his pipe. "I was just wondering," he muttered; and then a doubtful grin broke over his face. "I am still wondering. Look here, Miss Dawson; you are sure there was *no* article of furniture in that room you haven't described to us?"

"If you mean things like small ashtrays or desk ornaments—"

"No, no. I mean quite a large article of furniture."

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"I'm certain there wasn't. There couldn't very well be a large article of furniture that nobody would see."

"I wonder," said Colonel March. "Is Mr. Bowlder still at Greenacres? Excellent! I very much want to speak to him; and I want to see his study."

Under a sky heavy with threatening snow the police car left Scotland Yard early in the afternoon. It contained Chief Inspector Ames and the plain-clothes man who was driving in the front seat, with Marjorie Dawson and Colonel March in the rear seat. To the girl's protests that she wished to remain in London with Parrish, Colonel March was deaf; he said there was time enough for that.

At four o'clock they drove into the grounds of an ugly but highly substantial and highly respectable country house in Victorian Gothic.

Colonel March stood up as the car stopped in the drive.

"Where," he asked, "are the windows of the study?"

"At the back," said Marjorie. "You take the path round to the left—"

"Let's take it," said Colonel March.

Dusk was coming on, but no lights showed at Greenacres. They circled the house under the blast of an east wind, Colonel March stumping ahead with his coat collar turned up and an old tweed cap pulled low on his forehead. Climbing some flagged steps to a terrace, they looked into the nearer of the study windows; and came face to face with Mr. Ireton Bowlder looking out at them.

One of Bowlder's hands flattened out against the glass with white fingers. The other hand, which was wrapped in a handkerchief, he thrust into his pocket. In the twilight he looked nervous and a trifle greenish.

"Good afternoon," said Colonel March politely.

The wind whipped the words away; and Bowlder inside the glass was as silent as a fish in an aquarium, though his lips moved. Then Bowlder raised the window.

"I said good afternoon," repeated Colonel March. Before Bowlder could move back, Colonel March had reached out and shaken hands with him through the window. "You know most of us, I think."

"Yes," said Bowlder, looking at Marjorie. "What do you want?"

Colonel March leaned against the ledge of the window.

"I thought you would like to know," he said, "that the manager of the City and Provincial Bank was a little better this morning. That will probably make the charge against five persons something less than murder."

"Indeed. The fifth is young Parrish, I suppose?"

"No," said Colonel March. "The fifth is probably yourself."

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Again wind whipped round the corner of the house, ruffling Bowlder's neat hair. But Bowlder himself was not ruffled. He regarded them with a pale and skeptical smile; then he began to close the window.

"Better not," the Colonel advised. "We're coming in."

"You have a warrant?"

"Oh, yes. That window is now in working order, I see. Robinson," he looked at the plain-clothes man, "will climb through and stay with you while we go round by the front door."

By the time they reached the study, Bowlder had turned on a standing lamp by the table, upon which it threw a bright light, though most of the room was left in shadow. The room was exactly as Marjorie Dawson had described.

"Now, then," said Bowlder quietly, "will you explain what you mean by this nonsense about a charge?"

"If," said Colonel March, "the City and Provincial money is found here, you're likely to be charged with Skipper Morgan. That is what I meant."

"Gentlemen—and Miss Dawson—listen to me. How many times have I got to submit to this? You don't really mean you want to make still another search?"

"Yes."

"Look round you," said Bowlder. "Take a long careful look. Can you think of any place that could have been overlooked the first time?"

Chief Inspector Ames had to admit to himself that he couldn't. But Colonel March, instead of searching for a secret in the room, lowered himself into an easy chair by the table. Removing his cap and turning down the collar of his coat, he faced them with a kind of sleepy affability.

"In order to show you what I mean," he went on, "I must point out one of the curiously blind spots in the human mind. Has it ever occurred to you, Ames, that there's one piece of furniture in a room that nobody ever notices?"

"No, sir, it hasn't," said Ames. "You mean it's hidden?"

"On the contrary, I mean that it may be right there in front of everyone's eyes. But few people ever see it."

"Are you trying to tell me," asked the Chief Inspector, "that there's such a thing as an invisible piece of furniture?"

"A mentally invisible piece of furniture," returned Colonel March. "Would you like proof of it? You have one, my boy, in the sitting room of your own flat. I imagine there's one in the bedroom as well. It is under your eyes all the time. But suppose I said to you: 'Give me a list of every piece of furniture in your flat.' You would then give a list of things down to the smallest lamp shade or ashtray; but I am willing to bet you would omit this whacking great object—"

Chief Inspector Ames looked

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round rather wildly. But his eye fell on Mr. Ireton Bowlder, and he checked himself. Bowlder, who had been lighting a cigarette, dropped the match on the floor. Under the bright light of the lamp his forehead shone with sweat; and he was not smiling.

Ames stared at him. "Whether or not I understand you," he said, "by Jupiter, that fellow does!"

"Yes, I thought he would," agreed Colonel March, and got to his feet. "That's where he has hidden the money, you see."

"Oh, what on earth are you talking about?" cried Marjorie Dawson. She could keep herself in hand no longer, and she almost screamed. "What could be invisible? What is there we can't see? What part of the room is it in? What's the size of it? What's the color of it?"

"As for size," replied the Colonel, "it may vary a good deal, but in this case it is about three feet high, two and a half feet long, and three or four inches deep. In color it is sometimes painted a bright gilt; but in this case the object is painted a modest brown."

"What?"

"I mean," said Colonel March, "a steam radiator—particularly a dummy radiator like that one in the corner over there."

Ireton Bowlder made a run for the door, but he was tripped and brought down by P. C. Robinson. They were compelled to use handcuffs when they took him away.

"The possibilities of a dummy radiator, used for concealing something inside," said Colonel March, when they were on their way home, "deserve the attention of our best crooks. It is very nearly a perfect hiding place. It is compact. It will hold a great deal of swag. And it is the one thing we never seem to notice, even if we happen to be looking at it.

"Nobody, you see, regards it as a piece of furniture at all—certainly not as a piece of furniture in which anything could possibly be concealed. Inspector Daniels never looked twice at the radiator in Bowlder's study, and it is difficult to blame him. The radiator gave out heat, like an honest radiator; it was of iron; it seemed solid; it was *clamped to the floor.*

"You can buy one of them easily enough. They are really disguised oil stoves; portable, with several concealed burners, one under each coil. I have never forgotten the shock I received, sitting comfortably by a steaming radiator in the house of a friend of mine, when it suddenly occurred to me that the house was not centrally heated.

"Bowlder's radiator was a more elaborate affair, but one that could be constructed without difficulty. Two of the coils contained no burners, were invisibly hinged at the back, and formed hollow recepta-

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cles as large as he could wish. The house was centrally heated, so that a mere radiator aroused no suspicion whatever. It was, in short, a private safe without lock or combination, but so commonplace as to defy suspicion. I have been waiting for somebody to try the trick; and lo, somebody did."

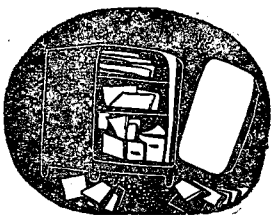
Marjorie Dawson looked at him inquiringly.

"You mean you expected to find one of those things when we went down to Greenacres?" she asked.

"I am the Department of Queer Complaints," said Colonel March with apology, "and I was on the lookout for it as soon as central heating was reported in that room. I wasn't sure, of course, until we talked to Bowlder through the study window. The banknotes would get rather warm, you can understand, from being in a compartment next to the oil burner. They wouldn't scorch, any more than our clothes scorch when we put them to dry on top of an ordinary radiator, but they would be tolerably warm; and so would the fastenings when Bowlder opened his safe. That was why he had to wrap a handkerchief round his right hand. And it was Chief Inspector Ames, with unerring intuition, who hit on the real clue long before it ever came to me."

"I did?" demanded Ames.

"Yes," said Colonel March. "You told me, with an accuracy beyond your wildest knowledge, that the money was hot."



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Continuing the Detective Dictionary (perhaps we should have said, the Defective Dictionary) in which A. C. Lamprey (brother of D. C. Lamprey) gives us a second A-to-Z listing of what can only be called exceedingly "Fishy" definitions . . .

GUMSHOE GLOSSARY: II

by A. C. LAMPREY

Alimony: An un-rare metal; an alloy composed of equal parts of silver and guilt.

Bailiff: A precautionary warning issued to mariners in case the water should rise too high. The Olde English spelling is the responsibility of Cuppe, who—together with Chaucer—have since given up literature for the field of music, where they are known as "The Platters."

Clandestine: A Scottish family, originally called the Clan MacDestine. The Mac was left behind in a pub one night, and was never recovered. Macs are never the same once they are recovered.

Colt: An unseasonable lowering of temperature in Miami Beach, Florida.

Down-Trodden: The result of down-trodding, which is similar to grape-stamping except that in down-trodding feathers or down are used. Actually, eider can be used.

Euthanasia: That portion of the Far East lying between Amman and Indonesia south of the twentieth parallel. It was once planned to consolidate this area into one country and call it Am-nesia, but the man who originally had the idea apparently forgot all about it.

Fanatic: A device for exhausting air from the upper part of a house. A similar apparatus for removing air from the basement is known as a "cellophane."

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Felonius: The Lord Chamberlain in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

Gibbet: That part of a chicken's viscera usually not considered good enough to be served to guests, but saved and given to the cat. Some cats like it, and others vice viscera.

Heist: The manner in which Cockneys serve their refrigerated drinks.

Hoax: Mighty trees that grow from small hacorns. There are many other similar woods: Helm, often used in ship construction, as well as Happle, used primarily for the production of Happlewhite furniture. And Hash, of course . . .

Immunity: A revolt against authority. The most famous, of course, was the disagreement in Biblical times which has come down through history as The Cain Immunity.

Interpol: The passage of time between elections.

Jack the Ripper: A particularly inept tailor of the Nineteenth Century who not only had to do everything a second time, but then had the nerve to charge double for it. He once made a formal evening suit for Nathaniel Hawthorne, who described the experience in his *Twice-Tolled-Tails.*

Knife-Artist: An expert with a palette. Throat specialists are usually pretty good with a palette. The most famous throat specialist, of course, was Perry O'Brien, who could throat over sixty feet.

Lie Detector: A scientific instrument for determining the amount of caustic in a solution. Caustic solutions usually come from sarcastic detectives.

Mortuary: An estuary in the Dead Sea.

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Mata Hari: Uncombed.

Nab: The fuzz on a carpet. The Police Commissioner is usually very fussy about nabs, and when they don't come off to his liking, he often has the fuzz on the carpet.

Out, Damned Spot!: This phrase is quite properly accredited to Lady Macbeth, who happened to have a lot of washing to do that day, and certainly couldn't be expected to do it with the dog running all over the castle.

Peccadilloes: In the sport of bullfighting, a set of dart-like instruments used to prod and infuriate the animal. Peccadilloes can be dangerous, and their use is not recommended for amateurs.

Quandary: A pit used for the procurement of building stone. People who fall in quandaries usually get hurt—unless, of course, they're already stoned.

Rex Stout: Beer fit for a king.

Swag: Half of a swagger, which naturally results in a bad limp. This tragic affliction is commonly caused by an infection of the limp glands. Swag, of course, is also the past tense of a verb meaning to drink.

Toxic: Said of a person who doesn't particularly mind listening to a clock tick, but is fed to the teeth with listening to it tock. Feeding to the teeth is not recommended, as 34% of our class can testify.

Underworld: A popular brand of typewriter. People who are treated to the benefits of an Underworld Typewriter seldom fail to get the message.

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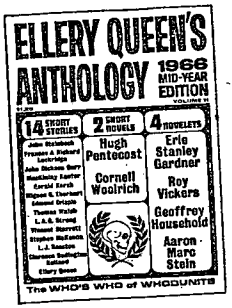
Vitriolic: A machine used for the playing of LPs. In England, MPs can also be played—vitriolically—but only, because of house rules, when the opposition is acid to.

Winchester: A county in New York State. Because of the character of its inhabitants, a Winchester is usually referred to as a "large bore" —as opposed to a "small bore," which is generally a tiresome midget.

X-Caliber: Meaning, naturally, before calibers were invented. King Arthur, aware of this, used the phrase to refer to his sword.

Yale Lock: The good fortune to be educated at the University in New Haven, Connecticut, rather than elsewhere. Elsewhere, of course, was the castle in Denmark where Hamlet was educated.

Zinc Poisoning: A common and dread disease usually caused by the failure to use sufficient Drano in the zinc.



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THE CORSICAN ORDEAL OF MISS X

by BERTRAND RUSSELL

I HAD OCCASION RECENTLY TO VISIT MY GOOD FRIEND, PROFESSOR N, WHOSE paper on pre-Celtic Decorative Art in Denmark raised some points that I felt needed discussing. I found him in his study, but his usually benign and yet slightly intelligent expression was marred by some strange bewilderment. The books which should have been on the arm of the chair, and which he supposed himself to be reading, were scattered in confusion on the floor. The spectacles which he imagined to be on his nose lay idle on his desk. The pipe which was usually in his mouth lay smoking in his tobacco bowl, though he seemed completely unaware of

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its not occupying its usual place. His mild and somewhat silly philanthropy and his usually placid gaze had somehow dropped off him. A harassed, distracted, bewildered, and horrified expression was stamped upon his features.

"Good God!" I said, "what has happened?"

"Ah," said he, "it is my secretary, Miss X. Hitherto, I have found her level-headed, efficient, cool, and destitute of those emotions which are only too apt to distract youth. But in an ill-advised moment I allowed her to take a fortnight's holiday from her labours on decorative art, and she, in a still more ill-advised moment, chose to spend the fortnight in Corsica. When she returned I saw at once that something had happened. 'What *did* you do in Corsica?' I asked. 'Ah! What indeed!' she replied."

The secretary was not in the room at the moment, and I hoped that Professor N might enlarge a little upon the misfortune that had befallen him. But in this I was disappointed. Not another word, so at least he assured me, had he been able to extract from Miss X. Horror piled upon horror glared from her eyes at the mere recollection, but nothing more specific could he discover.

I felt it my duty to the poor girl, who, so I had been given to understand, had hitherto been hard-working and conscientious, to see whether anything could be done to relieve her of the dreadful weight which depressed her spirits. I bethought me of Mrs. Menhennet, a middle-aged lady of considerable bulk, who, so I was informed by her grandchildren, had once had some pretences to beauty. Mrs. Menhennet, I knew, was the granddaughter of a Corsican bandit; in one of those unguarded moments, too frequent, alas, in that rough island, the bandit had assaulted a thoroughly respectable young lady, with the result that she had given birth, after a due interval, to the redoubtable Mr. Gorman.

Mr. Gorman, though his work took him into the City, pursued there the same kind of activities as had led to his existence. Eminent financiers trembled at his approach. Well-established bankers of unblemished reputation had ghastly visions of prison. Merchants who imported the wealth of the gorgeous East turned pale at the thought of Customs House officers at the dead of night. All of which misfortunes, it was well understood, were set in motion by the machinations of the predacious Mr. Gorman.

His daughter, Mrs. Menhennet, would have heard of any strange and unwonted disturbance in the home of her paternal grandfather. I therefore asked for an interview, which was graciously accorded. At four o'clock on a dark afternoon in November I presented myself at her tea table.

"And what," she said, "brings you here? Do not pretend that it is my charms. The day for such pretence is past. For ten years it would have

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been true; for another ten I should have believed it. Now it is neither true nor do I believe it. Some other motive brings you here, and I palpitate to know what it may be."

This approach was somewhat too direct for my taste. I find a pleasure in a helicoidal approach to my subject. I like to begin at a point remote from that at which I am aiming, or on occasion, if I begin at a point near my ultimate destination, I like to approach the actual point by a boomerang course, taking me at first away from the final mark and thereby, I hope, deceiving my auditor. But Mrs. Menhennet would permit no such finesse. Honest, downright, and straightforward, she believed in the direct approach, a characteristic which she seemed to have inherited from her Corsican grandfather. I therefore abandoned all attempt at circumlocution and came straight to the core of my curiosity.

"Mrs. Menhennet," I said, "it has come to my knowledge that there have been in recent weeks strange doings in Corsica, doings which, as I can testify from ocular demonstration, have turned brown hairs grey and young springy steps leaden with the weariness of age. These doings, I am convinced, owing to certain rumours which have reached me, are of transcendent international importance. Whether some new Napoleon is marching to the conquest of Moscow, or some younger Columbus to the discovery of a still unknown Continent, I cannot guess. But something of this sort, I am convinced, is taking place in those wild mountains, something of the sort is being plotted secretly, darkly, dangerously, something of the sort is being concealed tortuously, ferociously, and criminally from those who rashly seek to pierce the veil. You, dear lady, I am convinced, in spite of the correctness of your tea table and the elegance of your china and the fragrance of your Lapsang Souchong, have not lost touch with the activities of your revered father. At his death, I know, you made yourself the guardian of those interests for which he stood. His father, who had ever been to him a shining light on the road towards swift sucess, inspired every moment of his life. Since his death, although perhaps some of your less perspicacious friends may not have pierced your very efficient disguise, you, I know, have worn his mantle. You, if anyone in this cold and dismal city, can tell me what is happening in that land of sunshine, and what plots, so dark as to cause eclipse even in the blaze of noon, are being hatched in the minds of those noble descendants of ancient greatness. Tell me, I pray you, what you know. The life of Professor N, or if not his life at least his reason, is trembling in the balance. He is, as you are well aware, a benevolent man, not fierce like you and me, but full of gentle lovingkindness. Owing to this trait in his character he cannot divest himself of responsibility for the welfare of his worthy

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secretary, Miss X, who returned yesterday from Corsica transformed completely from the sunny carefree girl that once she was to a lined, harassed, and weary woman weighed down by all the burdens of the world. What it was that happened to her she refuses to reveal, but if it cannot be discovered it is much to be feared that that great genius, which has already all but solved the many and intricate problems besetting the interpretation of pre-Celtic decorative art, will totter and disintegrate and fall a heap of rubble, like the old Campanile in Venice. You cannot, I am sure, be otherwise than horrified at such a prospect, and I therefore beseech you to unfold, so far as lies in your power, the dreadful secrets of your ancestral home."

Mrs. Menhennet listened to my words in silence, and when I ceased to speak she still for a while abstained from all reply. At a certain point in my discourse the colour faded from her cheeks and she gave a great gasp. With an effort she composed herself, folded her hands, and compelled her breathing to become quiet.

"You put before me," she said, "a dreadful dilemma. If I remain silent, Professor N, not to mention Miss X, must be deprived of reason. But if I speak . . ." Here she shuddered, and no further word emerged.

At this point, when I had been at a loss to imagine what the next development would be, the parlour maid appeared and mentioned that the chimney sweep, in full professional attire, was waiting at the door, as he had been engaged to sweep the chimney of the drawing room that very afternoon.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "While you and I have been engaged in small talk and trivial badinage this proud man with his great duties to perform has been kept waiting at my doorstep. This will never do. For now this interview must be at an end. One last word, however. I advise you, if you are in earnest, but only if you are, to pay a visit to General Prz."*

General Prz, as everybody remembers, greatly distinguished himself in the First World War by his exploits in defence of his native Poland. Poland, however, in recent years had shown herself ungrateful, and he had been compelled to take refuge in some less unsettled country. A long life of adventure had made the old man, in spite of his grey hairs, unwilling to sink into a quiet life. Although admirers offered him a villa at Worthing, a bijou residence at Cheltenham, or a bungalow in the mountains of Ceylon, none of these took his fancy. Mrs. Menhennet gave him an introduction to some of the more unruly of her relatives in Corsica, and among

*Pronounced "Pish"

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them he found once more something of the *élan,* the fire and the wild energy, which had inspired the exploits of his earlier years.

But although Corsica remained his spiritual home, and his physical home during the greater part of the year, he would allow himself on rare occasions to visit such of the capitals of Europe as were still west of the Iron Curtain. In these capitals he would converse with the elder statesmen, who would anxiously ask his opinion on all the major trends of recent policy. Whatever he deigned to say in reply they listened to with the respect justly owing to his years and valour. And he would carry back to his mountain fastness the knowledge of the part that Corsica—yes, even Corsica—could play in the great events to come.

As the friend of Mrs. Menhennet, he was at once admitted to the innermost circle of those who, within or without the law, kept alive the traditions of ancient liberty which their Ghibelline ancestors had brought from the still vigorous republics of Northern Italy. In the deep recesses of the hills, hidden from the view of the casual tourist, who saw nothing but rocks and shepherds' huts and a few stunted trees, he was allowed to visit old palaces full of medieval splendour, the armour of ancient Gonfalonieri, and the jewelled swords of world-famous Condottieri. In their magnificent halls these proud descendants of ancient chieftains assembled and feasted, not perhaps always wisely but always too well. Even in converse with the General their lips were sealed as to some of the great secrets of their order, except indeed, in those moments of exuberant conviviality, when the long story of traditional hospitality overcame the scruples which at other times led to a prudent silence.

It was in these convivial moments that the General learned of the world-shaking design that these men cherished, a design that inspired all their waking actions and dominated the dreams in which their feasts too often terminated. Nothing loath, he threw himself into their schemes with all the ardour and all the traditional recklessness of the ancient Polish nobility. He thanked God that at a period of life when to most men nothing remains but reminiscence he had been granted the opportunity to share in great deeds of high adventure. On moonlight nights he would gallop over the mountains on his great charger, whose sire and dam alike had helped him to shed immortal glory upon the stricken fields of his native land. Inspired by the rapid motion of the night wind, his thoughts flowed through a mingled dream of ancient valour and future triumph, in which past and future blended in the alembic of his passion.

At the time when Mrs. Menhennet uttered her mysterious suggestion it happened that the General was engaged in one of his periodic rounds

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of visits to the elder statesmen of the Western world. He had in the past entertained a somewhat anachronistic prejudice against the Western hemisphere, but since he had learned from his island friends that Columbus was a Corsican he had endeavoured to think better than before of the consequences of that adventurer's somewhat rash activities. He could not quite bring himself actually to imitate Columbus, since he felt that there would be a slight taint of trade about any such journey, but he would call after due notice on the American Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, who always took pains to have a personal message from the President in readiness for his distinguished guest. He would, of course, visit Mr. Winston Churchill, but he never demeaned himself so far as to recognize the existence of Socialist ministers.

It was after he had been dining with Mr. Churchill that I had the good fortune to find him at leisure in the ancient club of which he was an honorary member. He honoured me with a glass of his pre-1914 Tokay, which was part of the *spolia opima* of his encounter with the eminent Hungarian general whom he left dead upon the field of honour with a suitable eulogy for his bravery. After due acknowledgment of the great mark of favour which he was bestowing upon me—a notable mark, for after all not even Hungarian generals go into battle with more than a few bottles of Tokay bound to their saddles—I led the conversation gradually towards Corsica.

"I have heard," I said, "that that island is not what it was. Education, they tell me, has turned brigands into bank clerks, and stilettos into stylographic pens. No longer, so they tell me, do ancient vendettas keep alive through the generations. I have even heard dreadful tales of intermarriage between families which had had a feud lasting eight hundred years, and yet the marriage was not accompanied by bloodshed. If all this is indeed true, I am forced to weep. I had always hoped, if fortune should favour my industry, to exchange the sanitary villa which I inhabit in Balham for some stormy peak in the home of ancient romance. But if romance even there is dead, what remains to me as a hope for old age? Perhaps you can reassure me; perhaps something yet lingers there. Perhaps amid thunder and lightning the ghost of Farinata degli Uberti is still to be seen looking around with great disdain. I have come to you tonight in the hope that you can give me such reassurance, since without it I shall not know how to support the burden of the humdrum years."

As I was speaking his eyes gleamed. I saw him clench his fists and close his jaws fiercely. Scarcely could he wait for the end of my periods. And as soon as I was silent he burst forth.

"Young man," he said, "were you not a friend of Mrs. Menhennet I

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should grudge you that noble nectar which I have allowed your unworthy lips to consume. I am compelled to think that you have been associating with the ignoble. Some few there may be among the riff-raff of the ports, and the ignoble gentry who concern themselves with the base business of bureaucracy—some few there may be, I repeat, of whom the dreadful things at which you have been hinting may be true. But they are no true Corsicans. They are but bastard Frenchmen, or gesticulating Italians, or toad-eating Catalans. The true Corsican breed is what it always was. It lives the free life, and emissaries of governments who seek to interfere die the death. No, my friend, all is yet well in that happy home of heroism."

I leapt to my feet and took his right hand in both of mine.

"O happy day," said I, "when my faith is restored, and my doubts are quenched! Would that I might see with my own eyes the noble breed of men whom you have brought so forcibly before my imagination. Could you permit me to know even one of them I should live a happier life, and the banalities of Balham would become more bearable."

"My young friend," said he, "your generous enthusiasm does you credit. Great though the favour may be, I am willing, in view of your enthusiasm, to grant the boon you ask. You shall know one of these splendid survivors of the golden age of man. I know that one of them, indeed one of my closest friends among them—I speak of the Count of Aspramonte—will be compelled to descend from the hills to pick up in Ajaccio a consignment of new saddles for his stallions. These saddles, you will of course understand, are made specially for him by the man who has charge of the racing stables of the Duke of Ashby-de-la-Zouche. The Duke is an old friend of mine, and as a great favour allows me occasionally to purchase from him a few saddles for the use of such of my friends as I deem worthy of so priceless a gift. If you care to be in Ajaccio next week, I can give you a letter to the Count of Aspramonte, who would be more accessible there than in his mountain fastness."

With tears in my eyes I thanked him for his great kindness. I bowed low and kissed his hand. As I left his presence, my heart filled with sorrow at the thought of the nobility that is perishing from our ignoble earth.

Following the advice of General Prz, I flew the following week to Ajaccio, and inquired at the principal hotels for the Count of Aspramonte. At the third place of inquiry I was informed that he was at the moment occupying the Imperial Suite, but that he was a busy man with little time for unauthorized visitors. From the demeanour of the hotel servants I inferred that he had earned their most profound respect. In an interview

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with the proprietor I handed over the letter of introduction from General Prz with the request that it should be put as soon as possible into the hands of the Count of Aspramonte, who, I learned, was at the moment engaged in business in the town.

The hotel was filled with a chattering throng of tourists of the usual description, all of them, so far as I could observe, trivial and transitory. Coming fresh from the dreams of General Prz I felt the atmosphere a strange one, by no means such as I could have wished. It was not in this setting that I could imagine the realization of the Polish nobleman's dreams. I had, however, no other clue, and was compelled to make the best of it.

After an ample dinner, totally indistinguishable from those provided in the best hotels of London, New York, Calcutta, and Johannesburg, I was sitting somewhat disconsolate in the lounge, when I saw approaching me a brisk gentleman of young middle-age whom I took at first to be a successful American executive. He had the square jaw, the firm step and the measured speech which I have learned to associate with that powerful section of society. But to my surprise, when he addressed me it was in English English with a Continental accent. To my still greater surprise he mentioned that he was the Count of Aspramonte.

"Come," he said, "to the sitting room of my suite, where we can talk more undisturbed than in this mêlée."

His suite, when we reached it, turned out to be ornate and palatial in a somewhat garish style. He gave me a stiff whisky and soda and a large cigar.

"You are, I see," so he began the conversation, "a friend of that dear old gentleman, General Prz. I hope you have never been tempted to laugh at him. For us who live in the modern world the temptation undoubtedly exists, but out of respect for his grey hairs I resist it.

"You and I, my dear sir," he continued, "live in the modern world and have no use for memories and hopes that are out of place in an age dominated by dollars. I for my part, although I live in a somewhat out of the way part of the world, and although I might, if I let myself be dominated by tradition, be as lost in misty dreams as the worthy General, have decided to adapt myself to our time. The main purpose of my life is the acquisition of dollars, not only for myself but for my island. 'How,' you may ask, 'does your manner of life conduce to this end?' In view of your friendship with the General I feel that I owe you an answer to this not unnatural query.

"The mountains in which I have my home afford an ideal ground for the breeding and exercising of race horses. The Arab stallions and mares

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which my father collected in the course of his wide travels gave rise to a breed of unexampled strength and swiftness. The Duke of Ashby-de-la-Zouche, as you of course are aware, has one great ambition. It is to own three successive Derby winners, and it is through me that he hopes to realize this ambition. His vast wealth is devoted mainly to this end. On the ground that the Derby offers an attraction to American tourists he is allowed to deduct the expenses of his stud from his income in his tax returns. He is thus able to retain that wealth which too many of his peers have lost. The Duke is not alone among my customers. Some of my best horses have gone to Virginia, others to Australia. There is no part of the world in which the royal sport is known where my horses are not famous. It is owing to them that I am able to keep up my palace and to preserve intact the sturdy human stock of our Corsican mountains.

"My life, as you will see, unlike that of General Prz, is lived on the plane of reality. I think more frequently of the dollar exchange than of Ghibelline ancestry, and I pay more attention to horse dealers than to even the most picturesque aristocratic relics. Nevertheless, when I am at home, the need to preserve the respect of the surrounding population compels me to conform to tradition. It is just possible that if you visit me in my castle you will be able to pick up some clue to the enigma which, as I see from the General's letter, is the cause of your visit to me. I shall be returning to my castle on horseback the day after tomorrow. It is a long journey, and an early start will be necessary, but if you care to present yourself at six o'clock in the morning I shall be happy to provide you with a horse on which you can accompany me to my home."

Having by this time finished the whisky and the cigar, I thanked him somewhat effusively for his courtesy, and accepted his invitation.

It was still pitch dark when on the next day I presented myself at the door of the Count's hotel. It was a raw and gusty morning and bitterly cold, with a hint of snow in the air. But the Count seemed impervious to meteorological conditions when he appeared upon his magnificent steed. Another, almost equally magnificent, was led to the door by his servant, and I was bidden to mount him. We set off, soon leaving the streets of the town and then, by small roads which only long experience could have enabled a man to find, we wound up and up to ever greater heights, at first through woodlands and then through open country, grass and rocks.

The Count, it appeared, was incapable of fatigue, or hunger, or thirst. Throughout a long day, with only a few moments' intermission during which we munched dry bread, ate some dates, and drank icy water from a stream, he conversed intelligently and informatively about this and that,

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showing a wide knowledge of the world of affairs and an acquaintance with innumerable rich men who found leisure for an interest in horses. But not one word did he utter throughout the whole of that long day on the matter which had brought me to Corsica. Gradually, in spite of the beauty of the scenery and the interest of his multi-lingual anecdotes, impatience mastered me.

"My dear Count," I said, "I cannot express to you how grateful I am for this chance to visit your ancestral home. But I must venture to remind you that I have come upon an errand of mercy, to save the life, or at least the reason, of a worthy friend of mine for whom I have the highest regard. You are leaving me in doubt as to whether I am serving this purpose by accompanying you on this long ride."

"I understand your impatience," he said, "but you must realize that, however I adapt myself to the modern world, I cannot in these uplands accelerate the tempo which is immemorially customary. You shall, I promise you, be brought nearer to your goal before the evening ends. More than that I cannot say, for the matter does not rest with me."

With these enigmatic words I had to be content.

We reached his castle as the sun was setting. It was built upon a steep eminence, and to every lover of architecture it was obvious that every part of it, down to the minutest detail, dated from the Thirteenth Century. Crossing the drawbridge we entered by a Gothic gateway into a large courtyard. Our horses were taken by a groom, and the Count led me into a vast hall, out of which, by a narrow doorway, he conducted me into the chamber that I was to occupy for the night. A huge canopied bed and heavy carved furniture of ancient design filled much of the space. Out of the window a vast prospect down innumerable winding valleys enticed the eye to a distant glimpse of sea.

"I hope," he said, "that you will succeed in being not too uncomfortable in this somewhat antiquated domicile."

"I do not think that will be difficult," said I, glancing at the blazing fire of enormous logs that spread a flickering light from the vast hearth. He informed me that dinner would be ready in an hour, and that after dinner, if all went well, something should be done to further my inquiries.

After a sumptuous dinner, he led me back to my room, and said, "I will now introduce you to an ancient servant of this house, who, from the long years of his service here, has become a repository of all its secrets. He, I have no doubt, will be able to help you towards the solution of your problem."

He rang the bell, and when it was answered, requested the manservant to ask the senechal to join in our conversation. After a short interval the

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senechal approached. I saw before me an old man, bent double with rheumatism, with white locks, and the grave air of one who has lived through much.

"This man," said my host, "will give you as much enlightenment as this place can afford."

With that he withdrew.

"Old man," said I, "I do not know whether at your great age I may hope that your wits are what they were. I am surprised, I must confess, that the Count should refer me to you. I had fondly imagined myself worthy to deal with equals, and not only with serving men in their dotage."

As I uttered these words a strange transformation occurred. The old man, as I had supposed him to be, suddenly lost his rheumatic appearance, drew himself up to his full height of six-foot three, tore from his head the white wig which concealed his ample coal-black hair, threw off the ancient cloak which he had been wearing, and revealed beneath it the complete costume of a Florentine noble of the period when the castle was built. Laying his hand upon his sword, he turned upon me with flashing eyes, and said, "Young man, were you not brought here by the Count, in whose sagacity I have much confidence, I should here and now order you to be cast into the dungeons, as an impertinent upstart, unable to perceive noble blood through the disguise of a seedy cloak."

"Sir," I said, with all due humility, "I must humbly beg your pardon for an error which I cannot but think was designed both by you and by the Count. If you will accept my humble excuses, I shall be happy to learn who it is in whose presence I have the honour to be."

"Sir," said he, "I will accept your speech as in some degree making amends for your previous impertinence, and you shall know who I am and what I stand for. I, sir, am the Duke of Ermocolle. The Count is my right-hand man, and obeys me in all things. But in these sad times there is need of the wisdom of the serpent. You have seen him as a businessman, adapting himself to the practices of our age, blaspheming for a purpose against the noble creed by which he and I alike are inspired. I decided to present myself to you in disguise in order to form some estimate of your character and outlook. You passed the test, and I will now tell you the little that I have a right to reveal concerning the trouble which has come into the life of your unworthy professorial friend."

In reply to these words I spoke long and eloquently about the professor and his labours, about Miss X and her youthful innocence, and about the obligation which I felt that friendship had placed upon my inadequate

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shoulders. He listened to me in grave silence. At the end he said, "There is only one thing that I can do for you, and that I will do."

He thereupon took in his hand an enormous quill pen, and on a large sheet of parchment he wrote these words: "To Miss X. You are hereby released from a part of the oath you swore. Tell all to the bearer of this note and to Professor N. Then *ACT.*" To this he appended his signature in full magnificence.

"That, my friend, is all that I can do for you."

I thanked him and bade him a ceremonial good-night.

I slept little. The wind howled, the snow fell, the fire died down. I tossed and turned upon my pillow. When at last a few moments of uneasy slumber came to me, strange dreams wearied me even more than wakefulness. When dawn broke, a leaden oppression weighed me down. I sought the Count and acquainted him with what had passed.

"You will understand," I said, "that in view of the message which I bear, it is my duty to return to England with all speed."

Thanking him once more for his hospitality I mounted the same steed upon which I had come and, accompanied by a groom whom he sent with me to help me in finding the road, I slowly picked my way through snow and sleet and tempest until I reached the shelter of Ajaccio. From there next day I returned to England.

On the morning after my return I presented myself at the house of Professor N. I found him sunk in gloom, decorative art forgotten, and Miss X absent.

"Old friend," I said, "it is painful to see you in this sad state. I have been active on your behalf, and returned but last night from Corsica. I was not wholly successful, but I was also not wholly unsuccessful. I bear a message, not to you, but to Miss X. Whether this message will bring relief or the opposite I cannot tell. But it is my plain duty to deliver it into her hands. Can you arrange that I may see her here in your presence, for it is in your presence that the message must be delivered."

"It shall be done," said he.

He called to him his aged housekeeper, who with sorrowful countenance approached to know his wishes.

"I wish you," said he, "to find Miss X, and request her presence urgently, imperatively, and at no matter what inconvenience."

The housekeeper departed, and he and I sat in gloomy silence. After an interval of some two hours she returned and replied that Miss X had fallen into a lethargy which had caused her to keep to her bed, but on receipt of Professor N's message some spark of doleful animation had re-

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turned to her and she had promised to be with him within a very short time. Scarcely had the housekeeper uttered this message when Miss X herself appeared, pale, distraught, with wild eyes and almost lifeless movements.

"Miss X," I said, "it is my duty, whether painful or not I do not yet know, to deliver to you this message from one who I believe is known to you."

I handed over the piece of parchment. She suddenly came to life, and seized it eagerly. Her eyes ran over its few lines in a moment.

"Alas!" she said. "This is not the reprieve for which I had hoped. It will not remove the cause of sorrow, but it does enable me to lift the veil of mystery. The story is a long one, and when I have finished it you will wish it had been longer. For when it is ended, it can be succeeded only by horror."

The Professor, seeing that she was on the verge of collapse, administered a strong dose of brandy. He then seated us round a table and in a calm voice said, "Proceed, Miss X."

"When I went to Corsica," she began, "and how long ago that seems, as though it had been in another existence, I was happy and carefree, thinking only of pleasure, of the light enjoyments which are considered suitable to my age, and of the delight of sunshine and new scenes. Corsica from the first moment enchanted me. I acquired the practice of long rambles in the hills, and each day I extended my rambles a little further. In the golden October sunshine, the leaves of the forest shone in their many bright colours. At last I found a path that led me beyond the forest on to the bare hills.

"In all-day rambles I caught a glimpse, to my immense surprise, of a great castle on a hill top. My curiosity was aroused. Ah! would that it had been otherwise. I was too late that day to approach any nearer to this astonishing edifice. But next day, having supplied myself with some simple sustenance, I set out early in the morning, determined, if it were possible, to discover the secret of this stately pile. Higher and higher I climbed through the sparkling autumn air. I met no human soul, and as I approached the castle it might have belonged to the Sleeping Beauty for all the signs of life that I saw about it.

"Curiosity, that fatal passion which misled our first mother, lured me on. I wandered round the battlements, seeking for a mode of ingress. For a long time my search was vain. Ah! would that it had remained so! But a malign fate willed otherwise. I found at last a little postern gate which yielded to my touch. I entered a dark abandoned out-house. When I had grown accustomed to the gloom, I saw at the far end a door stand-

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ing ajar. I tiptoed to the door and glanced through. What met my gaze caused me to gasp, and I nearly emitted a cry of amazement.

"I saw before me a vast hall, in the very centre of which, at a long wooden table, were seated a number of grave men, some old, some young, some middle-aged, but all bearing upon their countenances the stamp of resolution, and the look of men born to do great deeds. 'Who may these be?' I wondered. You will not be surprised to learn that I could not bring myself to withdraw, and that standing behind that little door I listened to their words. This was my first sin on that day on which I was to sink to unimaginable depths of wickedness.

"At first I could not distinguish their words, though I could see that some portentous matter was being debated. But gradually, as my ears became attuned to their speech, I learned to follow what they were saying, and with every word my amazement grew.

"'Are we all agreed as to the day?' said the President.

"'We are,' many voices replied.

"'So be it,' said he. 'I decree that Thursday, the 15th of November, is to be the day. And are we all agreed as to our respective tasks?' he asked.

"'We are,' replied the same voices.

"'Then,' he said, 'I will repeat the conclusions at which we have arrived, and when I have done so, I will formally put them to the meeting and you will vote. All of us here are agreed that the human race is suffering from an appalling malady, and that the name of this malady is *GOVERNMENT*. We are agreed that if man is to recover the happiness that he enjoyed in the Homeric Age and which we, in this fortunate island, have in some measure retained, abolition of government is the first necessity. We are agreed also that there is only one way in which government can be abolished, and that is by abolishing governors. Twenty-one of us are here present, and we have agreed that there are twenty-one important states in the world. Each one of us on Thursday, the 15th of November, will assassinate the head of one of these twenty-one states. I, as your President, have the privilege of assigning to myself the most difficult and dangerous of these twenty-one enterprises. I allude, of course, to . . . but it is needless for me to pronounce the name. Our work, however, will not be quite complete when these twenty-one have suffered the fate that they so richly deserve. There is one other person, so ignoble, so sunk in error, so diligent in the propagation of falsehood, that he also must die. But as he is not of so exalted a status as these other twenty-one victims, I appoint my squire to effect his demise. You will all realize that I speak of Professor N, who has had the temerity to maintain in many learned journals and in a vast work which, as our secret service has in-

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formed us, is nearing completion, that it was from Lithuania, and not, as all of us know, from Corsica, that pre-Celtic decorative art spread over Europe. He also shall die.'

"At this point," Miss X continued, amid sobs, "I could contain myself no longer. The thought that my benevolent employer was to die so soon afflicted me profoundly, and I gave an involuntary cry. All heads looked towards the door. The henchman to whom the extermination of Professor N had been assigned was ordered to investigate. Before I could escape he seized me and led me before the twenty-one. The President bent stern eyes upon me and frowned heavily.

"'Who are you,' said he, 'that has so rashly, so impiously, intruded upon our secret councils? What has led you to eavesdrop upon the most momentous decision that any body of men has ever arrived at? Can you offer any reason whatever why you should not, here and now, die the death which your temerity has so richly merited?'"

At this point hesitation overcome Miss X, and she was scarcely able to continue her account of the momentous interview in the castle. At length she pulled herself together and resumed the narrative.

"I come now," she said, "to the most painful part of my story. It is a merciful dispensation of Providence that the future is concealed from our gaze. Little did my mother think, as she lay exhausted, listening to my first cry, that it was to this that her newborn daughter was destined. Little did I think as I entered the Secretarial College that it was to lead to this. Little did I dream that Pitman's was but the gateway to the gallows. But I must not waste time in vain repining. What is done is done, and it is my duty to relate the plain unvarnished tale without the trimmings of futile remorse.

"As the President spoke to me of swift death, I glimpsed the pleasant sunshine without. I thought of the carefree years of my youth. I thought of the promise of happiness which but that very morning had accompanied me as I climbed the lonely hills. Visions of summer rain and winter firesides, of spring in meadows and autumn in the beech woods haunted my imagination. I thought of the golden years of innocent childhood, fled never to return. And I thought fleetingly and shyly of one in whose eyes I fancied that I had seen the light of love. All this in a moment passed through my mind. 'Life,' I thought, 'is sweet. I am but young, and the best of life is still before me. Am I to be cut off thus, before I have known the joys, and the sorrows too, which make the warp and woof of human life? No,' I thought, 'this is too much. If there yet remains a means by which I may prolong my life I will seize it, even though it be at the price of dishonour.' When Satan had led me to this dreadful

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resolve I answered with such calmness as I could command: 'Oh, reverend Sir, I have been but an unwitting and unintentional offender. No thought of evil was in my mind as I strayed through that fatal door. If you will but spare my life I will do your will, whatever it may be. Have mercy, I pray you. You cannot wish that one so young and fair should perish prematurely. Let me but know your will and I will obey.' Although he still looked down upon me with no friendly eye, I fancied I saw some slight sign of relenting. He turned to the other twenty, and said, 'What is your will? Shall we execute justice, or shall we submit her to the ordeal? I will put it to the vote.' Ten voted for justice, ten for the ordeal. 'The casting vote is mine,' he said. 'I vote for the ordeal.'

"Then turning again to me, he continued, 'You may live, but on certain terms. What these terms are I will now explain to you. First of all you must swear a great oath—never to reveal by word or deed, by any hint or by any turn of demeanour, what you have learned in this hall. The oath which you must fulfil I will tell you, and you must repeat the words after me: I SWEAR BY ZOROASTER AND THE BEARD OF THE PROPHET, BY URIENS, PAYMON, EGYN, AND AMAYMON, BY MARBUEL, ACIEL, BARBIEL, MEPHISTOPHIEL, AND APADIEL, BY DIRACHIEL, AMNODIEL, AMUDIEL, TAGRIEL, GELIEL, AND REQUIEL, AND BY ALL THE FOUL SPIRITS OF HELL, THAT I WILL NEVER REVEAL OR IN ANY MANNER CAUSE TO BE KNOWN ANY SLIGHT HINT OF WHAT I HAVE SEEN AND HEARD IN THIS HALL.'

"When I had solemnly repeated this oath, he explained to me that this was but the first part of the ordeal, and that perhaps I might not have grasped its full immensity. Each of the infernal names that I had invoked possessed its own separate power of torture. By the magician's power invested in himself he was able to control the actions of these demons. If I infringed the oath, each separate one would, through all eternity, inflict upon me the separate torture of which he was master. But that, he said, was but the smallest part of my punishment.

"'I come now,' said he, 'to graver matters.'

"Turning to the henchman, he said, 'The goblet, please.'

"The henchman, who knew the ritual, presented the goblet to the President.

"'This,' he said, turning again to me, "is a goblet of bull's blood. You must drink every drop, without taking breath while you drink. If you fail to do so, you will instantly become a cow, and be pursued forever by the ghost of the bull whose blood you will have failed to drink in due manner.' I took the goblet from him, drew a long breath, closed my eyes, and swallowed the noxious draught.

"'Two-thirds of the ordeal,' he said, 'are now fulfilled. The last part

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is slightly more inconvenient. We have decreed, as you are unfortunately aware, that on the 15th of November, twenty-one heads of state shall die. We decided also that the glory of our nation demands the death of Professor N. But we felt that there would be a lack of symmetry if one of us were to undertake this just execution. Before we discovered your presence, we delegated this task to my henchman. But your arrival, while in many ways inopportune, has in one respect provided us wih an opportunity for neatness which it would be unwise and inartistic to neglect. You, and not my henchman, shall carry out this execution. And this to do you shall swear by the same oath by which you swore secrecy.'

"'Oh, sir!' I said, 'do not put upon me this terrible burden. You know much, but I doubt whether you know that it has been both my duty and my pleasure to assist Professor N in his researches. I have had nothing but kindness from him. It may be that his views on decorative art are not all that you could wish. Can you not permit me to continue serving him as before, and gradually I could wean him from his errors. I am not without influence upon the course of his thoughts. Several years of close association have shown me ways of guiding his inclinations in this direction or that, and I am persuaded that if you will but grant me time I can bring him round to your opinions on the function of Corsica in pre-Celtic decorative art. To slay this good old man, whom I have regarded as a friend and who has hitherto, and not unjustly, regarded me in not unlike manner, would be almost as terrible as the pursuit of the many fiends whom you have caused me to invoke. Indeed, I doubt whether life is worth purchasing at such a price.'

"'Nay, my good maiden,' said he, 'I fear you are still indulging in illusions. The oath you have already taken was a sinful and blasphemous oath, and has put you forever in the power of the fiends, unless I, by my magic art, choose to restrain them. You cannot escape now. You must do my will or suffer.' I wept, I implored him, I knelt and clasped his knees. 'Have mercy,' I said, 'have mercy.' But he remained unmoved. 'I have spoken,' he said. 'If you do not wish to suffer forever the fifteen separate kinds of torment that will be inflicted by each of the fifteen fiends you have invoked, you must repeat after me, using the same dread names, the oath that on the 15th of November you will cause the death of Professor N.'

"Alas! dear Professor. It is impossible that you should pardon me, but in my weakness I swore this second oath. The 15th is rapidly approaching, and I see not how I am to escape, when that day comes, the dread consequences of my frightful oath. As soon as I got away from that dreadful castle, remorse seized me and has gnawed at my vitals ever since.

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Gladly would I suffer the fifteen diverse torments of the fifteen fiends, could I but persuade myself that in doing so I should be fulfilling the behests of duty. But I have sworn, and honour demands that I should fulfil my oath. Which is the greater sin, to murder the good man whom I revere, or to be false to the dictates of honour? I know not. But you, dear Professor, you who are so wise, you, I am sure, can resolve my doubts and show me the clear path of duty."

The Professor, as her narrative advanced towards its climax, somewhat surprisingly recovered cheerfulness and calm. With a kindly smile, with folded hands and a completely peaceful demeanour, he replied to her query.

"My dear young lady," he said, "nothing, nothing on earth, should be allowed to override the dictates of honour. If it lies in your power you must fulfil your oath. My work is completed, and my remaining years, if any, could have little importance. I should therefore tell you in the most emphatic manner that it is your duty to fulfil your oath if it is in any way possible. I should regret, however, I might even say I should regret deeply, that as a consequence of your sense of honour you should end your life upon the gallows. There is one thing, and one thing only, which can absolve you from your oath, and that is physical impossibility. You cannot kill a dead man."

So saying, he put his thumb and forefinger into his waistcoat pocket and with a lightning gesture conveyed them to his mouth. In an instant he was dead.

"Oh, my dear master," cried Miss X, throwing herself upon his lifeless corpse, "how can I bear the light of day now that you have sacrificed your life for mine? How can I endure the shame that every hour of sunshine and every moment of seeming happiness will generate in my soul? Nay, not another moment can I endure this agony."

With these words, she found the same pocket, imitated his gesture, and expired.

"I have not lived in vain," said I, "for I have witnessed two noble deaths."

But then I remembered that my task was not done, since the world's unworthy rulers must, I supposed, be saved from extinction. Reluctantly I bent my footsteps towards Scotland Yard.

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

There is far too little informed analysis of the suspense novel; and Patricia Highsmith's PLOTTING AND WRITING SUSPENSE FICTION (The Writer, $4) deserves a vigorous welcome despite its limitations. The author admits that she seldom reads "other people's suspense books," and cannot discuss them; but she is able to view her own important work with unusual acute objectivity. Result: a stimulating and valuable book (with many references to Miss Highsmith's work in EQMM).

★★★★ **BLACK MONEY, *by Ross Macdonald*** (Knopf, $3.95)

Early each year, Lew Archer's creator produces the year's best private-eye novel—which is also a substantial novel of America.

★★★★ **THE CRACK IN THE TEACUP, *by Michael Gilbert*** (Harper & Row, $4.50)

In yet another new departure for him, Gilbert studies municipal corruption in seaside England—a quietly brilliant social melodrama.

★★★ **A CHILD DIVIDED, *by Henry Cecil*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Not precisely a crime novel (though involving blackmail and murder) but a deft and witty legalistic fiction of British law on adoptions.

★★★ **A SURFEIT OF SUN, *by Sean Graham*** (Doubleday, $4.50)

Another enjoyable borderline entertainment: a shrewd novel of The New Africa centering around a trial for ritual murder.

★★★ **DATE WITH DEATH, *by Elizabeth Linington*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Nice mixture of cases for the Hollywood police, with a mite more humor than in most of the solid-procedural series.

★★★ **DOVER THREE, *by Joyce Porter*** (Scribner's, $3.50)

If you haven't met Chief Inspector Dover, the blight of Scotland Yard, be sure to try this dexterously plotted failure/triumph.

★★★ **NIGHT'S EVIL, *by Mark McShane*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

Extremely curious characters in and around a traveling fair lend zest to another puzzle by one of the most individual recent writers.

(*Continued on page 134*)

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(*Continued from page 133*)

★★★ **THE HEAT'S ON, by Chester Himes** (Putnam's, $4.95)

Another bitter, macabre, grotesque fantasia of crime in Harlem, which will delight some readers and shock others.

★★★ **DEVILWEED, by Bill Knox** (Crime Club, $3.50)

Her Majesty's Fishery Cruisers provide fascinating specialized detection; and this novel adds a vivid picture of the Hebrides.

★★★ **THE MIDNIGHT MAN, by Henry Kane** (Macmillan, $3.95)

Introducing a new Kane detective, ex-Inspector McGregor, in an adroit puzzle, enhanced by night-life glamor and good food.

Spy. dept.: If you are getting tired of spy-fiction, even as good as is listed below, try a refresher course in spy-fact. Colonel Vernon Hinchley's SPIES THAT NEVER WERE (Dodd, Mead, $3.95) shatters popular illusions about such "spies" as Dreyfus, Hiss and Pontecorvo. Walter B. Gibson's THE FINE ART OF SPYING (Grosset & Dunlap, $2.95) includes superlative firsthand accounts by spies Franz von Rintelen and Winston Churchill. (Its companion volume, THE FINE ART OF MURDER, is less exciting but does include a great essay by A. J. Liebling.)

★★★ **Z FOR ZABORRA, by Eva-Lis Wuorio** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.50)

Fine feminine humor and lovely ambiguities in off-trail story of a spy re-recruited because she needs plastic surgery.

★★★ **DARK BLOOD, DARK TERROR, by Brian Cleeve** (Random, $3.95)

Sean Ryan, who here finds both private love and the love of mankind urging him from his job, is a major modern (fictional) spy.

★★★ **THE BILLION DOLLAR BRAIN, by Len Deighton** (Putnam's, $4.95)

Plot less tight-knit than in FUNERAL IN BERLIN; but Deighton's post-Hammett storytelling remains hard, incisive and compelling.

★★★ **TRAITOR BETRAYED, by Osmington Mills** (Roy, $2.95)

The detectival problems attending a scientist's defection, prettily plotted by an underrated English author.

As if there were not enough spy-books in print, Macmillan has reissued the first 7 of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels, from CASINO ROYALE (1954) to GOLDFINGER (1959), in attractive uniform format ($3.95 each)

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The Sherlock Holmes parody-pastiche to end all Sherlock Holmes parody-pastiches . . .

A CASE OF IDENTITIES

by MARGARET NORRIS

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE GLORIOUS mornings that can happen so unexpectedly in early spring. Until now the weather had been reluctant to admit that winter was really past, and cold damp breezes had kept even the most adventurous from rambling in the park except in heavy overcoats and wool mufflers.

This morning, however, the sky was blue and the air balmy, and I considered this an excellent augury. Children swarmed round the fountain under the benevolent eye of a very large policeman, and I sat on a bench quivering in excited anticipation. At long last Sherlock Holmes was to become part of my life again! The event had been put off far too long already.

I was, I admit, somewhat apprehensive. I had been looking for my old acquaintance for some time, convinced by many little clues that the force of his great mind was at work in this new world. I had finally hit upon the idea of advertising in the agony columns of the daily newspapers, thus: *S.H. If you remember the days of The League, for God's sake come to me. Watson* —with a box number that would reach me.

I suspected he was aware of his own identity and I believed that such an appeal would fetch him to me. Now I had had my answer, and at any moment he would be coming along to find me on the third bench from the fountain.

I anticipated that he would be, as I was, much changed. Curiosity might have dictated that I sit at a distance, in order to observe him before he discovered me; but I was determined upon fair play, and so I was on the proper bench, and had even armed myself with a medical volume, that he might have no early doubt as to my identity.

While I waited, I carried on a desultory conversation with the immense collie who has been my companion of late, and who lay patiently beside the bench, alternately eyeing the children playing round the policeman and the path down which the figure of our visitor might be expected to appear.

He did not keep us waiting long. Nor did he hesitate perceptibly at sight of us, though the shock must have been great. I am compelled to

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admit that, although I had considered all possibilities in anticipating his appearance, I was for a moment disappointed in him.

He was now the direct antithesis, physically, of all he had been—ridiculously short, bustling, apple-cheeked, and very fat. Worse, he was exceedingly young, and his walk bespoke the aggressiveness he had never openly displayed in the past. Watching him approach, I groaned at the indignity of his gigantic brain being trapped in such an uninspiring physical form.

He came to my side, his eyes searching my face anxiously. "Can it be?" he asked. "Can this really be my old friend Watson?"

"Reincarnation has created an amazing change in both of us," I admitted. "Nevertheless, I am very glad to see you again, Holmes." We clasped hands.

"I was wondering how I should find you," he said, "when your advertisement came to my attention. Such a simple course of action had not occurred to me. How fortunate you remembered my habit of reading the newspapers thoroughly each day."

"Considering how much of our time together you spent with your nose buried in the news, it would seem queer indeed if I did not remember."

He chuckled. "Ah, Watson, your sense of humor runs in the same old vein. I had a moment of fear, when I first saw you, that it would not."

"And I was tempted to laugh aloud when I saw you. But upon closer inspection I recognize the old intelligence in your eyes, and, considering the indications I have had recently that you are continuing to operate in the old pattern, I discount any notion that you are not as dangerous as ever you were."

"Dangerous? But surely that is an odd word to use between us?"

I decided on a bold stroke. "Not at all. Come, sir, let us throw off these disguises and face each other on the old footing. You are dangerous to me, and I am certainly dangerous to you—Professor Moriarty!"

He fell back a pace. "Really, Watson, if this is a joke—"

"It is certainly not a joke. And I am not Watson. Do you not guess the truth, even now? I am Holmes."

"Ah, of course." He gazed at me intently, and smiled. "I should have anticipated it. But your advertisement bespoke the good Watson so genuinely that I was taken in. I decided too easily that the bumbling doctor, could I but get into his confidence, would sooner or later lead me to you, for you would surely be looking for him. I suppose you planned it so?"

"Yes. I needed to find you. Your vast criminal organization has been too successful lately; it is being felt in too many places around

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the world. You had to be stopped until we could gather all the threads into our hands and destroy them. There were many paths by which I might have reached you, but time was of the essence, so I decided upon subterfuge. It has turned out excellently." I rubbed my hands.

He was puzzled. "I really cannot see how our meeting will be of benefit to you. You have no evidence against me, or you would have used it; and now that we have met I can as easily recognize you as you can recognize me. Unless you are in disguise?" He leaned forward to examine me. "No. Even you could not be that good! And forgive me for saying it, but I see no danger in you in your present form." He laughed.

"And yet, even as you stand there you are in the greatest danger," I said calmly. I was determined that his amusement should not nettle me. I was not ashamed of my condition; indeed, it had certain advantages.

He looked around in some alarm. "You have men covering me with revolvers? But surely, Holmes, that would not be following your usual code of fair play?"

"No. No one offers you physical violence, my dear Professor. And yet you are in imminent danger. I give you fair warning."

He became angry. "Of what use is a warning when I cannot perceive the cause for it? I declare, Holmes, I think you are pulling my leg. It would be best if I leave you before I lose my temper."

"You will not find it that easy to leave," said I.

He came closer and glowered at me. "No? And pray, why not?"

"Because of yourself—your curiosity and your temperament. You need to find out what I intend to do."

"And what do you intend to do?" He was suddenly enraged. His apple-cheeked face turned crimson, and his fat hands closed round my arms. He shook me, and I cried out in pain. "What do you have up your sleeve, you—you *female!*"

In three strides the gigantic policeman was upon us and holding Moriarty firmly by the collar. My collie, who had been about to clamp his teeth into the Professor's leg, subsided with a growl. I chuckled.

"I had in mind doing exactly what I did do—force you to forget what I now am, and attack a woman in a public park, before witnesses. You have betrayed yourself into the hands of the law. You are undone!"

He howled with rage, struggling in the indomitable grip of the policeman. "By heaven I will get my revenge for this, Holmes!"

"Perhaps," I said negligently. "But I think that first you will go up for a suitable stretch, after I give my evidence. You will be well out

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of the way while we dispose of your organization. Take him away."

"And," I added, as the majestic arm of the law started off, "don't be too gentle with him, my good Lestrade!"

The policeman grinned, and touched his cap. "No sir, Miss Holmes," said he.

"Well, we are alone again." I bent to pat my faithful collie. "There was a moment when I thought you would have the leg off him, Watson. It is good to be able to rely on your friendship once more. Although sometimes I wish—I wish you had not returned as a dog. However, I suppose it was inevitable. 'Man's best friend,' and all that. Just as it was inevitable that poor Lestrade should have to pay for his sins by being a policeman all over again. I do wonder, though, what I ever did to deserve having to come back as a woman."

Together we walked slowly out of the park.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**WILLIAM MacHARG**
TITLE:	***East Side Homicide***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	O'Malley
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	30 years ago
COMMENTS:	*You never can tell what O'Malley is thinking. There's never much to work on, he says; he's got no ideas, he says; it'll never be solved, he says—but leave it to O'Malley, the unimaginative cop.*

A WOMAN GOT MURDERED ON THE East Side," O'Malley said. "It looks like it was a funny kind of case. She was about sixty years old and everybody in the neighborhood knew who she was, but there didn't nobody know anything about her.

"The name they knew her by was Miss Dubois, but it turns out she had several different names. There was some addresses in her place, and they found one guy that told 'em things about her but it don't point to why she should get killed."

"What have you got to work on?" I inquired.

"Not much. My idea is this gets marked 'Unsolved.' Well, still I got to run around and look at it."

We looked at the woman. She must have been very pretty in her youth. She had been strangled with a woman's belt. Her clothes were of the best quality and the belt matched the dress.

"What's this?" O'Malley asked.

He showed me some pinholes in the bosom of her slip.

"She seems to have worn a brooch," I said.

"Yeah? On her underclothes?"

He took a pattern of the pinholes on a piece of paper.

"We'll see the guy that told the cops them things," he said.

Copyright 1936 by William MacHarg; renewed; originally titled "The Checkered Suit."

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The man's name was Collingham. We found him in a small but impressive office in the Wall Street neighborhood. He was a distinguished-looking man of about fifty.

"How was it about that lady that got knocked off?" O'Malley asked.

"I've already told the police all I know, but I don't mind repeating it. She was a sort of pensioner of mine. Years ago this woman was a motion-picture actress. Her screen name was Vera Cain. I worshiped her on the screen, but at that time I didn't meet her. A few years ago I encountered her on the street. Of course, she was greatly changed, but in spite of that I recognized her and introduced myself, and I learned that she was in want.

"In memory, as you might say, of my youth, I got her address and sent her a small check. A man like myself, who has made a great deal of money, picks up a certain number of people who are dependent on him. After that, each month I sent her a small check."

"I guess you seen her pretty often after you found out where she lived."

"No, I never saw her except that one time on the street. She wrote me a note of thanks each month but I didn't keep them."

"You send her a check this month?"

"Yes, on the first, as I always did if I remembered it."

"That check been cashed?"

"Yes, it was cashed."

"You don't seem to feel very bad because the dame got bumped off."

"There's no reason why I should. She was no longer the girl whom I remembered."

"Okay."

"That's a nice fellow, O'Malley," I remarked after we had left him.

"He talks like it."

We went to see her home where she was killed. It was a poor neighborhood. There were pushcarts along the curb and a street filled with children; people sat on crowded doorsteps. A cop let us into her apartment. It was luxurious. The furniture was of expensive make, the bed things were lace and silk.

"Well, this is a surprise, O'Malley!" I exclaimed. "Collingham can't have known she was well off. Why did she live in this neighborhood?"

"I guess she wanted to. How was this?" he asked the cop.

"They don't know much. The guy came in the window."

He showed us. A rear window had been forced open. The window opened on a court. There was a fire escape under the windows of the next apartment.

We examined the place carefully. Dresser drawers had been pulled out and the things scattered about; the cops hadn't done that. The closets were filled with expensive clothes. In one closet there was a trunk. The police had searched it but we went through its contents. There were souvenirs from hotels

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and steamship lines and summer and winter resorts.

"This dame was a gay one in her time," O'Malley remarked.

"She must have been."

"It's my idea it will turn out she was some kind of crook. What time did the medical guy say this dame got bumped?" he asked the cop.

"About four o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"What become of that address book they found?"

"They got it at the station house."

O'Malley telephoned the station house to send us the address book.

"What do you make of it so far?" I asked.

"I got no ideas."

"I have," I said.

"Yeah?"

"This is the kind of case," I said, "where the police go wrong because they find too many things that might be clues. They aren't really clues, and so they waste time on things that get them nowhere. Those things have nothing to do with her being murdered."

"Go on—you're doing swell. What is it that has got to do with it?"

"The way she lived and the way she dressed. In this kind of neighborhood she was simply courting robbery. Collingham had just sent her some money; whether she kept her money in her apartment or not, people around here must have believed she did. Anyway, the murderer believed it. It's plain how he got in. He came up or down the fire escape and reached across and forced the window open and stepped from the fire escape onto the sill."

"You're good. Who was the guy?"

"Of course I don't know that, but it's plain he lives in this neighborhood. The killing took place in midafternoon when other windows were open on this court and someone may have seen him."

"Well, we can find that out."

We went around and asked the people whose windows opened on the court. The window directly across belonged to a photographer. He hadn't seen anything, but he said his partner might have; the partner wasn't there. The other people hadn't seen anything.

When we got back to the apartment a man was there with the address book. There wasn't much in it—a few telephone numbers and a few street numbers. O'Malley called one of the phone numbers.

"Is Freeman there?" he asked. Somebody answered. "Ain't this the Sheffield Hotel?" he inquired.

"What is it?" I asked.

"He says it's a meat market."

"Who's Freeman?" I asked.

"That ain't no guy. I just made that up to find out whose phone it was."

He tried the other phone numbers the same way, but they all turned out to be tradesmen's places.

"Well, nothing in that," he said.

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"I guess we won't find nothing in these addresses either."

One of the addresses was Collingham's. We went around to all the others. The first one turned out to be a beauty shop.

They knew Miss Dubois as a customer, but of course they had no idea who'd killed her. She was known the same way at most of the other addresses. At two places we couldn't find anyone who'd ever heard of her. One of these places wasn't really an address at all—the street number came in Central Park.

"Well, that ends that," I stated.

"Why, no," O'Malley said. "It ends them places where they knew about her, but we got two they don't. Why would she have a number that comes in the park? I think that looks funny. I'm figuring this dead dame was a crook, and crooks got ways of writing things so that whoever finds 'em won't read 'em right. It might be we got that kind of business here. One way is, they write the numbers backwards."

I studied the two addresses. One said 236 Cathedral Parkway and the other one, 345 Columbus Avenue. On the same page it said "3F." We looked up 632 Cathedral Parkway and 543 Columbus, but it got us nothing.

"There's still another way they do," O'Malley said. "If they write two addresses, one gives the right number but the other one gives the street."

There was no such number as 345 Cathedral Parkway, so we tried 236 Columbus. A good-looking young man about 22 years old opened the door of apartment 3F.

"Who're you?" O'Malley asked.

"Joe Harrill. How about yourself?"

"A cop don't have to give a name." O'Malley showed his shield. "We'd like to look around your place."

"Well, go ahead."

We searched the room, and then him, and in his pocket we found three $100 bills with pinholes through them. The holes matched the pinholes in the pattern O'Malley had taken from the dead woman's slip.

"Well, guy," O'Malley said, "we got you."

"For what?"

"For knocking off Miss Dubois and robbing her of her dough."

"I haven't killed anybody and I never heard that name before. My aunt gave me that money."

"Yeah? You'll get a chance to prove that to the Inspector."

We took him to the station house.

"This has been extraordinarily fine police work, O'Malley," I commended him.

"Sure, it's swell work," he said, "except I don't think this is the guy that done the killing."

I was astonished. "Why, you've practically proved it," I said. "You must be crazy!"

I saw O'Malley next day.

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"Well, have you got the proof on Harrill?" I inquired.

"Boy, we ain't got no proof on nobody. Most cops think Harrill was the one. That Miss Dubois had a police record but it was long ago; some old-time cops remembered her. Collingham ain't the only guy that give her money. So we got other suspects, but we don't know who.

"That Collingham ain't what he looks and talks like; he ain't rich, he's broke. The report is he made what dough he once had dealing in counterfeit bonds, but it was never proved on him.

"Guys came to Miss Dubois' place sometimes to see her, and some kids saw a strange guy around there the afternoon that she got killed. They can't describe him except he was wearing a checkered suit. I don't know if anybody could get from that fire escape into the window, so we're going to try that out."

We went to Miss Dubois' apartment. Some plain-clothes cops were there and one was wearing a checkered suit. The man in the checked suit went up to the roof, while we stood in the courtyard watching him, and he came down the fire escape and tried to force the window open from the landing.

He couldn't do it. Then a younger cop tried it and he did it all right.

"There you have it, O'Malley!" I exclaimed. "It was a young man. That shows it was Harrill."

"Yeah, fine!" he said. "Only the laboratory says them casts they took of the toolmarks on the window frame show that the window got opened from inside. You try it that way now," he directed the man in the checked suit.

We went inside. The cop in the checked suit forced the window open with what I thought at first was a jimmy, but I saw later that it was a steel knife sharpener. Apparently he didn't do it right, for O'Malley made him repeat it several times.

"That's the right way," he told him at last.

Then another cop who had waited in the court came in.

"Okay," he said.

We went to headquarters. After a while a cop came and gave O'Malley an envelope and O'Malley went into the Inspector's room. He came out again and we waited and Collingham came in with a couple of cops.

"We need your help on that Dubois killing," O'Malley told him.

"I'll be glad to do anything I can."

"We want you to tell us how you knocked her off."

Collingham got white.

"You're nutty in the head!" he declared.

"Our heads are all right. You want me to tell you how it was? You'd been paying blackmail to her, but now she tried to shake you for a bigger bunch of dough. You

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went there to argue with her. We got some kids seen you go in her place.

"She wouldn't believe you when you told her you was broke and you strangled her to shut her mouth. You got a knife sharpener out of the kitchen and fixed the window to make it look like some guy had broken in, and you scattered her things around so we'd think it was a robbery."

"You're wrong."

"Yeah, sure, we're crazy. A photographer has a place across that court. What you don't know is that the guy happened to be trying out a camera."

He showed Collingham a photograph. Collingham gazed at it and then stared at the floor and his body seemed to be folding up.

"I'll talk with the Inspector," he said after a couple of minutes.

They went into the Inspector's room. Some cops were studying the photograph and I looked at it over their shoulders. It showed the cop in the checked suit pretending to force open the window; the man's face was in shadow but his clothes showed plainly.

"Collingham was a fool to fall for that fake picture," I told O'Malley when he came out of the Inspector's room.

"You can't tell what no guy will fall for. He recognized his own checked suit."

"*His* suit?" I asked. "How was all this?"

"Why, I'd think you'd guess. That Miss Dubois was one time in pictures, like Collingham said, but she was a lot of other things besides. She was a gay kid and she picked up enough on several well-off guys to ruin 'em, and then afterwards she lived on it. She lived in that neighborhood so she wouldn't meet people that she knew in her old days.

"I guess she could have went on like that until she died, except for this young guy Harrill. She told him she was his aunt, but we can't find out she ever had a sister or brother, and it's my idea he is her son. However that was, she didn't want him to know nothing about what she'd been or how she lived.

"He understood his folks was dead and he was always in school and in summer he was with other kids in camp, and the money for them things was sent through a bank. He says he never seen his aunt but twice, and the name he knew her by wasn't none she used anywhere else.

"The second time he seen her was the day she got killed. He was through school and he had come to New York and got a room, and she came to see him and she give him some money that she unpinned from inside her clothes. She asked him what business he wanted to get in and said she'd send him the money to get started in it. She expected to get the dough from Col-

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lingham. The rest was the way I told it just now to Collingham."

"I don't see yet," I said, "how you knew Collingham was the one who killed her."

"I didn't till the guy admitted it. You're kind of dumb. I only figured this dead dame was a crook, and Collingham had a reputation as another one. It looked like she had been holding him up, though he wouldn't tell she was, so I wondered did he kill her?

"Some kids had seen a guy go to the building in a checked suit. Collingham wasn't wearing no checked suit when we seen him, and I wondered did he own one.

"Some cops went round the neighborhood where he lived and seen all the clothes cleaners, till they found out who cleaned his clothes; and the people there said they'd cleaned and pressed that kind of suit for him. So then we had a guy from the cleaner's go to Collingham's and tell his wife that Collingham had telephoned 'em to press his checked suit; she give it to him.

"I didn't have no idea about the photograph until after we got the suit, but then I figured we might try that piece of business on him. So I found a cop that looked as much like Collingham as I could and had him put on Collingham's suit. After he'd tried getting into the window from outside, we went inside and I had 'em take that photograph. You know, I ain't sure even yet if Collingham really fell for that photograph, or if it only made him think we had so much on him he might as well confess."

"It was a smart trick, O'Malley."

"Anyway it caught a fish. Maybe instead of a cop I ought to be a crook, but I figure a crook works harder than a cop, and I ain't that fond of working."

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**JEAN POTTS**
TITLE:	***The Inner Voices***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*An unusual and beautifully written story about a problem that faced a man's wife, mistress, mother, and brother—and how they acted and reacted . . .*

ESTRELLA'S FIRST IMPULSE HAD BEEN TO CANCEL HER USUAL BIRTHDAY REunion this year; it would be too poignant without her favorite son, Byron. But then—as she pointed out, in her bravest tremolo—an Inner Voice had spoken. They must carry on, in spite of their aching hearts and the mute pathos of the one vacant chair. Dear Byron would not want it otherwise. He who could nevermore be with them in the flesh would be with them in spirit.

There she went, stealing her daughter-in-law's lines again. Completely shameless. After all, Byron's widow, not his mother, was entitled to the starring role. But Mary Ethel could afford to be big about it. "Exactly my feeling," she said in the sincere, spontaneous tones that had come across so well in her television interview. "I'm sure Byron wouldn't want his mother's sixtieth birthday to pass unnoticed."

"Fifty-ninth," said Estrella. "I knew you'd understand, my dear."

Then she called Tennyson, who of course questioned the advisability. As the one son left to her, he took his responsibilities seriously. "Are you sure you're up to it, Mother? We all know how hard this has hit you, in spite of the way you've borne up so wonderfully. Not that I'm trying to dictate or anything, you understand—I realize you're the best judge—"

"Then I'll see you on the fifteenth," said Estrella, who was sometimes circumspect about overruling Tennyson's objections and sometimes not,

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depending on how busy she was. "I can't decide about inviting Carol. What do you think?"

"Carol? Oh. Well, Mother, I hardly know what to say. I mean—"

There was a pause. Then Estrella said gently, "Yes. I think Byron would want her to be with us."

So it was settled. They would meet, but they would miss him.

Indeed they would; indeed they did; it was their own business how and for what reasons . . .

In one of the more moving passages of her forthcoming book, Mary Ethel described (with certain basic modifications) the incredulity that still seized her at times, oftenest on her return to the empty apartment, just before she turned her key in the lock. It can't be true, she would think; when I open the door Byron will be there.

No doubt all widows had such heart-stopping moments, even those who had actually looked into their husbands' dead faces. But Byron's body had never been recovered from the Everglades swamp where his little plane had crashed six months before. He remained incorrigibly alive in Mary Ethel's memory—and, sometimes, in her imagination.

This was one of the times, this glum February afternoon, the day before the scheduled birthday reunion. She had lunched, at delightful length, with her editors. It was spitting sleet; mindful of her new feather hat (what a grand piece of luck that black was so becoming to her), she dashed from the cab to the street door of the reconverted brownstone where she stayed on, and started up the stairs that led to her second-floor apartment.

Here it was, the familiar inner quaver, like the delicious self-induced shivers that children feel when they tell each other ghost stories. Only a dream, she thought: Byron was not dead. When she opened the door he would come toward her, smiling his doggedly hopeful smile. *There you are, honey,* he would say, and there she would be, thudded back into reality. Not Byron's widow. His wife.

She unlocked the door and stepped into the dusky hall. Everything was just as she had left it. Of course. On her way to the living room she drew a tremulous sigh.

"There you are, honey," he said. "How's tricks?"

The parquet floor under her feet lurched and tipped upward like a ship in a heavy swell. Her hand groped for the wall and found it. Solid, real. No sound now but the click of sleet against the living-room windows. The room itself was already so dark, on this sunless day, that she could not distinguish swarming shadow from impossible substance.

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He switched on the table lamp. There he stood, alert, nimble-looking, head tilted in the characteristic way. He risked a smile, but not a step toward her.

"I couldn't get you on the phone," he explained. "So I thought I'd drop by and leave a note in the mailbox. But I still had the door key, and—hey. Hey, Mary Ethel, you're not going to faint, are you?"

She shook her head. Sat down, carefully, on the edge of the wing-back chair. Closed her eyes. Opened them again. He was still there.

"The crash," she whispered. "They told us you couldn't possibly have survived."

"I damn near didn't." He spoke with jaunty complacence. "Wouldn't have, except these Indians came along and fished me out of the swamp. The last thing I remember is thinking, 'This is it, boy, you've had it,' and when I came to it was two months later and the alligators hadn't eaten me, after all. By that time all I had to worry about was a bad case of malaria. Too mean to die, I guess." He paused, but she made no comment. "Would you like a brandy?"

"Please," she said. He had a pronounced limp, she noticed as he crossed to the liquor cabinet. He had always been thin; now he was like a contraption of wire coat hangers and twine, with a piece of parchment for a face. The malaria. Which hadn't killed him, either. "You might at least have called from down there. Or written. You might have given me some warning."

"Yes. I didn't intend to shake you up like this. But somehow I—" He limped over with her brandy. "You look great, Mary Ethel," he said shyly. "Beautiful." He stayed there in front of her, carefully not touching her. "All right, I'll tell you the truth. I didn't call or write because I couldn't make up my mind about whether to come back or not."

"Not come back?"

"Not come back," he repeated. "Let Byron Hawley stay as dead as everybody—including me, for a while there—thought he was. Who needed him? It makes you stop and think, a narrow squeak like that. I couldn't help wondering, for instance, whether you—Well. You've got to admit, we weren't doing so hot, you and I, when I took off on that last trip."

"It wasn't my fault," she reminded him bitterly. "You were the one. You and that cheap little stenographer of yours, Carol. Don't blame me for the way we were doing."

"But I never would have gotten mixed up with Carol if—ah, skip it. We've been through this too many times already."

"Yes, we have." She resisted the temptation to add that, to Carol at

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least, it was now ancient history. Let him find out for himself. "I suppose you've seen her?"

"No," he said shortly. "You're the only one who knows I'm back."

"You haven't even seen your mother? Or Tennyson?" She felt an inner whirring, as if an antenna were beginning to vibrate. *You're the only one who knows I'm back. The only one that knows I'm alive.*

"Not yet. I wanted to see you first. I suppose Tenny's taken over at the office?"

She nodded. "I haven't seen much of him lately. We've both been busy. Your mother's having her birthday do tomorrow. You came back just in time." No vacant chair, after all. "She's very busy these days too, trying to get through to you in The Great Beyond. She and Dr. Mehallah. He's her latest discovery."

He gave a whoop of laughter. "No! Have they had any luck?"

"Don't be ridiculous," said Mary Ethel, who saw nothing funny about Estrella's fitful dabblings in the deeper mysteries. This time especially it was no laughing matter, as Byron would find out when—if—he talked to his mother. The whirring inside her grew and grew.

"What a pity for me to turn up now and spoil the fun!" The laughter faded from his eyes. "Brings us right back to what I was saying. I couldn't help wondering whether you wouldn't rather be my widow than my wife."

"That's a terrible thing to say!" Not so terrible, though, as the thing vibrating inside her. Her eyes darted away from his.

"Oh, I don't know. I wasn't too sold on Byron Hawley myself. What had he ever done except inherit his father's business and get married and learn how to fly his own plane? The business ran itself. Probably still does, with Tenny in charge. The marriage was damn near on the rocks. Even the plane was smashed up . . . I kept thinking what a good chance it was to get rid of Byron Hawley, just shuck him off and start from scratch."

She laughed scornfully. "What would you have used for money? Or didn't you worry about that?"

"Not very much. I'm a good mechanic, an expert bartender, an inspired dishwasher. Besides, I had a sizable chunk of cash with me—still have most of it. No, what worried me was whether or not Byron Hawley was worth resurrecting."

"And you decided he was."

"Not exactly," he said. "I decided I had to come back and find out for sure. Mary Ethel, look at me. Please—"

She struck out, in a panic, at his hand. But there was no escape from his unwavering gaze; slowly and relentlessly it forced her head up until

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he was looking into her eyes, until he was seeing what must be blazing in them. "Somebody else. Is that it? Some other guy?"

She began to laugh, in gusts like sobs. "No," she gasped, "here, let me show you." She crossed to the desk and came back with the advance copy of her book. *How To Be a Widow: A Testament of Love and Courage.*

Tick-tick-tick went the sleet against the window while he read the blurb. Which she knew by heart: the inspiring, true story of a young woman's battle against sorrow and her victory over despair . . . The photograph of Mary Ethel on the dust jacket was artfully misty, a face seen through a blur of tears, shadowed with tragedy, lit with hard-won tranquility.

Byron's own face remained blank as he studied it. He flicked through the pages, pausing here and there. Which part might he be reading now? The description of their idyllic life together? The heartbreaking memories that attacked without warning? (They had moved her editor to tears; he had said so, only today at lunch. Thick-skinned cynic that he was, he had said.)

Tick-tick, till at last he closed the book.

"Is it a best-seller?" he asked.

"It isn't out yet officially. They've been giving it a big play—"

Her voice threatened to break. To have so much within her grasp—the recognition, the fame, rightfully hers, but denied her until now; and then to have it snatched away. Byron's return will transform her and her book into a household joke. Even if the publishers withdrew it—and could they, with the release date only a week away?—word would get around. There would be snickering little innuendoes in the columns that were plugging it even now; all the publicity, so flattering, so thrilling, would boomerang into derision.

"Do I congratulate you?" said Byron. "Or do I apologize? Yes, I guess so. Excuse me for living." He picked up his trench coat. "I didn't realize you had such a nice career going as a professional widow."

She faced him unabashed, too absorbed in hating him to mind the sneer in his voice. All right. A career. Why not? He himself admitted he had considered not coming back, had wondered if she might not rather be his widow than his wife. Well, now he knew.

Ah, but so did she. *You're the only one who knows I'm back.* And there was no need for anyone else ever to know—if she were quick enough, bold enough, strong enough, clever enough, lucky enough. So many ifs. And so little time. Because it had to be now; she must act first and plan later. She must dare to take the chance while it was still hers.

"You're leaving?" she asked in a voice muffled, in her own ears, by the

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thick beating of her heart, and as he started across the room she followed. The poker, she thought as she passed the fireplace, but already it was too late—he was glancing back.

Something in the hall, then. The bronze nymph on the table. Her hand closed over its smooth weight convulsively. One blow, struck from behind while he was opening the door. It might be enough—just the one blow. But it did not have to be. She foresaw that her arm, once released, would go on pounding like an automatic hammer; at this moment it was tensing with the force of those potential blows.

She had fallen a little too far behind. Now she must hurry so as to be close enough when he reached the door, just before he turned. Two more steps, and then, and then—

And then—too soon, before she was ready—he turned, so nimbly in spite of his limp, and his hand shot out and closed on her wrist. There was a flash of pain in her arm, a thump as the bronze nymph fell to the carpeted floor.

"Better luck next time," he said.

He was smiling, but not in the doggedly hopeful way she remembered. Now his eyes were stony. Now he knew her.

Just before he slid through the door he added, "So long, Mary Ethel. See you at Mother's reunion."

"Not a manifestation?" Estrella repeated wistfully. "But we were so hoping for one. It would have meant so much to Dr. Mehallah—"

"Sorry to disappoint you." Sorry, indeed! Byron was grinning all over his face. Now he planted a noisy, juicy smack in the slope of her neck. "There. Does that feel like a manifestation?"

She had to admit that it did not. And while spirits were sometimes prankish, she had never heard of one who smelled of brandy or left wet footprints on the rug. Byron in the flesh, no doubt about it, and of course she was overjoyed. Her son, her favorite son—which probably wasn't fair; Tennyson was so much more agreeable, so restful, and she never had any trouble getting her own way with Tenny. Whereas Byron could be difficult.

"Sit down, dear." She sat down herself, with the rattling, clashing sound effects that accompanied all her movements. The long strands of beads and multiplicity of bracelets were as much a part of her as her dimples or the fluttery voice and big blue eyes that gave her such a guileless look.

She wiped away her tears and fluffed her hair. "I'll be all right in a minute. I just can't quite—Indians, you said? You must tell me again—

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I want to hear the whole story. My poor boy! I suppose you've seen Mary Ethel?"

He did not answer at once, and when he did it was ambiguously. "That can wait." Then he launched into the whole story she had asked for.

But as he talked, her mind kept straying to Dr. Mehallah. Would it be better to plunge in and get it over with—the element of surprise might work wonders—or to coast into it gradually? Byron would notice though; he wasn't like Tenny. Either way, her Inner Voice informed her, he was going to be difficult. And then Mary Ethel. Did he mean *seeing* her could wait? Or—*How To Be a Widow!* ha!—did he mean *talking about* her could wait?

"So here I am," he was finishing, "just in time for your birthday party. The bad penny that always turns up."

"Nothing of the sort!" she cried--extra-heartily, on account of the pang of disappointment she had just felt: she would have to disinvite Dr. Mehallah to her party. It simply wouldn't do, not with Byron here. "This is the most wonderful birthday present anybody ever dreamed of. Let me see, did you say you have seen Mary Ethel? Because if you haven't—"

"First tell me what's with this Dr. Whatshisname, the manifestations fellow. Was I supposed to rap on tables, or write on slates, or what?"

"Dr. Mehallah relies on his own powers in attaining the mystic state, not on any of the usual trappings," said Estrella stiffly. Then she flashed her dimples at him. "Shame on you for making fun of me. I only did it because I missed you so. I would have given anything for a sign from you."

She had grieved, really. Why, that first night she was beside herself. Tenny had to call the doctor to give her a sedative. Someone had suggested travel as a therapeutic agent, so she had signed up for a cruise, any cruise. And that was where she met Dr. Mehallah.

Strange, strange how fate had woven its pattern; she had felt from the first that Dr. Mehallah's coffee-brown eyes were piercing to her very soul and drawing it out of her body, had heard in his high-pitched voice the cadence of unearthly music, had known beyond all question that in the furtherance of his work she had found her true mission in life. But how explain this to Byron? She sighed.

"Never mind, Mother. There must be plenty of other *bone-fide* spirits for Dr. Mehallah to concentrate on, now that I'm out of the running. No need to drop the guy on my account."

Her temper snapped. That indulgent, superior smile of his! "I have no intention of dropping Dr. Mehallah. Ever. Naturally you wouldn't un-

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derstand what it means to me to be able to help a man of his gifts. Neither does Mary Ethel, not that it's any of her business—"

He straightened up, alert now, a hound on the scent. "Help? What kind of help were you planning to give him?"

"I'm still planning it! And you can't stop me!" But he could. She jumped to her feet, in clattering, chattering agitation. "Tenny's agreed to it—oh, I know you've always belittled him, but at least he doesn't close his mind the way some people I could mention; and another thing, he's got a little feeling for his mother, and if your father were alive he'd be the first to say go ahead. So it's three against one—four, counting Dr. Mehallah—so what right have you to stop us?"

"Stop you from doing what?"

"It's not as if there weren't other institutions for those delinquent boys every bit as good as Hawley Farm. Better, in fact, and bigger. Your father admitted himself that it's only a drop in the bucket. Why, there's only room for twenty. What's the good of a place that small? It's not worthwhile."

"Dad thought it was," said Byron, in an ominously mild voice. "So do quite a few other people. Mother, are you planning to turn Hawley Farm over to Dr. Mehallah?" He was on his feet now too; he actually took her by the shoulders and gave her a little shake.

"I have a right," she wavered. "It's in my name."

"It's in yours and Tenny's and mine. And you may have conned Tenny into making hash of what Dad wanted, but you won't con me. You know as well as I do that Dad would never in the world consent to any such deal. And neither will I. Believe me, if you hand over Hawley Farm to this phoney mystic of yours, it'll—"

"He's not! You take your hands off me!"

"—be over my dead body."

The words throbbed, eerily amplified, echoing and re-echoing. *Over his dead body* She had thought that was how it was. Yes. She had believed she was safely beyond the reach of his voice that would not agree, his hand that would not sign, his will that would not bend to hers. Not of course that she had ever wished him dead—

She did now. For once in her life Estrella looked truth in the eye. It wasn't fair for him to be alive when they said he couldn't be. It was as if he had played a monstrous practical joke on her, pretending to give her freedom, only to pull her up sharp just when she was making the most of it. He was her favorite son—and she wished the swamp had swallowed him. She did not want him alive, with the power to block her.

She wanted him dead. Dead.

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Horror-struck, she stared into his haggard face.

"Over my dead body," he repeated, and released her—just let his hands drop and abandoned her. He picked up his trench coat and slung it over his shoulder. "Unfortunately, I'm still alive. I'll be back for your party. Try to bear up until then."

"Byron! Don't leave me—" she wailed, and she burst into the more or less genuine sobs that had stood her in such good stead so many times in the past. But the door was already closing behind him. Her breath caught in a spasm of shock and fury. The nerve of him! To drop this bombshell on her and then simply walk away from the wreckage, simply stroll calmly off to—to whoever was next on his list. Mary Ethel? Or had he already seen her?

Oh, she didn't know. She didn't know what to *do*. She covered her face with her plump little hands and whimpered.

Once he recovered his power of speech, Tennyson said, with such vehemence that he hardly recognized his own voice, "No, not at a bar. Come on back to the office. We can talk there."

"Okay," said Byron cheerfully. He, Byron, didn't sound any different. His greeting had been so nonchalant, and the way he had swung into step, so poised and ease, as if only a fusspot like Tenny would see anything momentous about this meeting—typical of him, typical. His limp (which women would like as not think romantic) was new, and he was skinny as a stray cat. Otherwise he was the same old Byron, and Tenny was the same old—

No. Absolutely not. He had changed, and Byron was, by gad, going to find it out. He was going to have to get used to playing second fiddle himself, for a change. Tenny lifted his solemn, fleshy face to the wind-driven sleet, squared shoulders, and inwardly pledged allegiance to the new man he had become, was now, and forever would be, world without end, amen.

"I figured you'd probably still be at the office," Byron was saying. "You always were a great one for overtime."

"And still am. More so, in fact. What I say is, a real executive can't expect to stick to a nine-to-five schedule. He's got to forget about watching the clock and concentrate on getting the job done. Personally, I find I accomplish more after five than during office hours. You don't get the interruptions. No phone calls, et cetera. You can buckle right down and think a problem through."

"That's the spirit," said Byron, whose own attitude toward his executive

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responsibilities had been light-hearted, to say the least. They would get around to that little matter, among others, before they were through.

The lobby of the office building was deserted except for the elevator starter, new since Byron's time, so they were spared a goggle-eyed reunion scene. Tenny gave the man a preoccupied nod, as became the head of Hawley Enterprises; and after the self-service elevator had borne them smoothly upward, he led the way, keys in hand, past the switchboard where a night light glowed and into the hushed darkness of the President's office.

To Tenny's secret relief, Byron sat down on the green leather couch, leaving the chair behind the massive desk for its rightful owner. Not that Tenny would have insisted on making an issue of it; but this way the question did not arise.

Ensconced in the security of his big chair, Tenny felt in control of himself and of the situation. His legs stopped their nervous trembling, now that they were planted firmly under the desk, which stretched like a bulwark between him and his brother.

But then Byron reached over and slid open the right-hand door of the bookcase. "Ah! Glad to see you still file the bourbon in the same place. Join me?"

"Here, let me. I'm sorry, I should have offered—" Yes, he should have. It disturbed the balance, to have Byron pouring out the drinks as if he owned the place. It put Tenny at a subtle disadvantage. Why hadn't he thought of it! Inwardly fuming, he sipped and listened, with half an ear, to Byron's account of his hairbreadth escape. He was rather flippant about it. Trust Byron.

Of course he was not dead. It seemed to Tenny that—without ever admitting it, least of all to himself—he had known it all along. For the past six months he had been waiting for some such moment as this; tonight when Byron fell into step beside him he had felt not so much the throb of astonishment as the thud of suspense ended.

He straightened his glasses and cleared his throat. "I'd like to query you on your plans," Tenny announced. "Is it your intention to pick up where you left off here at the office?"

"I haven't thought much about it. You seem to be doing okay."

"I like to think so. It hasn't been easy, let me assure you." He let that sink in, and wound up significantly, "Under the circumstances."

"Which circumstances would those be? I suppose I did leave a loose end or two, if that's what you mean—"

"I mean that Carol—Miss York—found it impossible to continue covering up your little manipulations. And I'd like to go on record right here

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and now, Byron. You may be able to rationalize the fund juggling to your own satisfaction. But not to mine. Let me assure you. Not to mine. With Miss York's assistance I was able to adjust the matter without its becoming common knowledge, and as far as I'm concerned there's no necessity for ever mentioning it again. I simply wanted to go on record. One more point. If you have any idea of penalizing Carol—Miss York—for exposing what not even she, loyal as she was, could no longer hide, if you have any idea—Well. You will have me to deal with." He leaned back, flushed with triumph.

"I see," Byron said at last. No denial or defense. Just the mild, thoughtful statement, followed—as might have been expected—by the irrepressible grin. "How is Carol, anyway? Miss York?"

"Very well, thank you. As you may already have heard, Miss York has consented to be my wife."

"You're kidding. Carol and you?" Byron exploded into laughter.

And Tenny, having carried everything off so well (except for the drink business), with such dignity and force, now Tenny had to spoil it all by squeaking, "What's so funny?" No other word for it. Squeaking. He couldn't stop, either. "I fail to see—funny, is it? You think just because—shut up!"

He was on his feet, gripping the desk that was no longer a bulwark, quivering with rage and despair at this foolish, flustered, familiar fellow who was his old self—the self he had presumed was gone forever but of course was no more dead than Byron. They were inseparable, this old self and Byron—like Siamese twins; there was no getting rid of the one as long as the other lived.

"Sorry, Tenny." Byron swallowed another guffaw. "I'm sorry—I think it's very nice. Congratulations."

"Thank you for nothing. I know what you're thinking."

It was the basic, galling thing between them, the root that had produced silly old Tenny in the first place. And why? What was there about Byron that drew women to him? Oh, he didn't always come out ahead—Mary Ethel, for instance—but there had to be an exception to prove the rule.

All his life Tenny had bitterly watched the rule in operation: Byron could pick and choose, while he himself must scramble and scrabble for nothing better than a wallflower. If that. Why? It wasn't as if Byron were tall, dark, and handsome. Far from it. He had never bothered much about clothes or the little gestures—corsages, jewelry, et cetera—that were supposed to be so important. Tenny had spent more lavishly, had sweat through dancing lessons, had observed all the fine points of etiquette—

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and it didn't make a bit of difference; if he got a girl to date him it meant she was really from hunger.

Except Carol. No shortage of men in Carol's life; and if that fact now and then cost Tenny an uneasy pang—well, that was the price you paid for winning such an attractive girl. But his heart contracted in sudden pain. Would he have won her, even as a secretary, if Byron had stayed on the scene? The gossip about her and Byron was only gossip, according to her; surely Tenny knew her better than to believe she would take up with a married man! He most assuredly did. And yet, and yet—

He could not help remembering that she had never so much as glanced his way while Byron was around, any more than he could suppress the thought of what she might do now that Byron was back. The thought that flared up, intolerable and uncontrollable as fire: one wave of Byron's hand was all it would take to bring her running, one flick of his finger could flatten Tenny's house of cards.

No wonder Byron had laughed. No wonder he sat there now, with that unconcerned air, as much as to say, There it is, Tenny my boy. What are you going to do about it?

Kill him. It clicked into Tenny's mind, precise as a shot. He was supposed to be dead. Carol thought he was dead. Let her go on thinking so. Kill him and along with him his Siamese twin, the old silly Tenny.

For one dazzling moment it was that uncomplicated—no qualms, no fear of consequences to hold him back. With his hands planted on the desk, he leaned forward giddily, staring down at his brother's bent head. Then he remembered the others. Mother. Mary Ethel. Even if by some fluke Byron had come here first and they still thought he was dead—even then, there was the elevator starter who had seen them come back together; there were all the little potential slip-ups gathering now in a gnatlike pestering swarm.

And there was Byron himself. He was looking straight up at Tenny now, no longer smiling or unconcerned. His eyes were inexpressibly sad and knowing, like a monkey's. "Relax, Tenny. I'm not out to grab anything away from you. I don't know why it is, we always wind up in some kind of a hassle. Well, time I shoved off."

"Where are you—I suppose you've already seen Mary Ethel and Mother. You'd go to them first, I suppose."

"Do you? Byron cocked his head, grinning a little in the old way. "Why don't you check with them, Tenny? You can't take my word for anything. You know that. I'm dishonest."

"It's Carol, then. Isn't it? I'm warning you, Byron, if you try to—"

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"I just want to thank her for her loyalty, that's all. And naturally wish her happiness. So long, Tenny. See you at Mother's reunion."

The door sighed shut behind him. Tenny's knees buckled; but though he sagged in his chair, inert as a sack of flour, inside he still spluttered and raged. Every rankling word came back to him, every gesture, and always in the background was the contemptible squeak of his own voice. Except for that one exalted moment when he hadn't *cared* who knew of what slip-ups he made. That one moment—lost forever, he had let it go by—when he could have done it, should have done it.

But Mother. Mary Ethel. The elevator starter.

He made a strangled sound and put his head down on the desk.

"Now wait a minute," Carol said into the cream-colored telephone in her bedroom. "Sure you sound like him, but Byron Hawley's dead. D-e-a-d. So you *can't* be him. Or if you are you've got to do more than sound like him to prove it to me."

"Okay. Remember last Decoration Day in Atlantic City? It rained so hard there wasn't anything to do but—" He elaborated, in vivid detail.

"Oh, Byron, it *is* you!" Her heart leaped. Then it swooped. "Listen, where are you? I can meet you. Unless you'd rather come up here. I've got to see you. We can't talk over the phone."

"We can try."

"Well, of course if you don't want to see me—" She sat down on the avocado bedspread and reached for a cigarette. Her hand was trembling. "I don't think Tenny would approve. Do you?"

"So you've seen him." She decided against the cigarette. Her hand, still trembling, began a little pleating project on her black net petticoat. Pleat, smooth. Pleat, smooth. "Listen, Byron, look at it from my point of view."

"I am. It's very educational."

"Don't be such a dog in the manger. After all, a girl's got to think of her future. I never noticed you breaking your neck to make me any offers. I mean, any that were going to get me any further than a rainy week-end in Atlantic City. Tenny may not look like such a bargain—"

"No? From your point of view I'd say he was just about perfect. Especially now that he's moved up into my old spot. I know, money isn't everything, but Tenny has other assets. He's so nice and unsuspecting. You can have your future, plus all the fun on the side that comes along."

"I don't have to take that from you," she said icily. Pleat, smooth. Pleat, smooth. "And to think I *bawled* when they said you were dead! Oh Byron, please, if only I could see you I'm sure I could explain—"

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"I know how persuasive you can be, dear. So I'm not taking any chances."

"You mean you don't trust yourself?" She stretched her legs and smiled.

"I don't trust you, that's for sure. How long had you been dipping into the till before I passed to my reward?"

She stopped smiling. She said, too quickly, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, come on, Carol. You're talking to me, not to Tenny. I've got to hand it to you, you saw your chance and grabbed it. It would have worked, too, if only I'd had the decency to stay d-e-a-d."

"You think Tenny's going to take your word instead of mine? You can't prove it. Couldn't even if it was true. Why, he'll laugh in your face!"

"He wasn't laughing when I left him," said Byron.

"You rat! Wait. Just wait. Don't think you can barge in like this and louse me up—out of spite, that's all, nothing but spite—"

"Oh, I don't know. I might just possibly want to clear my name."

"Your name," she screeched. "Your name is mud! And not just in my book, either. What about your precious wife? Oh, brother, would I like to listen in on that little reunion! Even your mother—"

She stopped for breath. Well, what was he waiting for? Why didn't he say something? Silence. Not a word out of him.

"Byron? Byron, you there?"

"I'm here," he said. He didn't sound angry, or even upset. Just tired. "That's the whole problem, isn't it? I'm here. Okay, Carol. I'll be seeing you. That is, if you're going to Mother's party." And just like that, he hung up on her.

Presently she remembered to hang up too. But her hand remained curved around the phone, as if waiting for a signal. Call Tenny? Not now, not yet. She was too churned up, she needed time to pull herself together. And anyway, why hadn't Tenny called her? Only one reason, she thought, and shivered. Proof. Byron must have some actual proof that had convinced Tenny.

She had been so sure, had figured out every possible angle except this impossible one: it had never crossed her mind that Byron might not be dead, that he might come back. The whole scheme grew out of his death. Depended on it. And collapsed without it.

Oh, she knew the fix she was in—she wasn't one to kid herself. That was why she had latched onto Tenny while she had the chance. There weren't going to be too many more chances—never mind how persuasive she might still be at moments. And now—she could forget about being Tenny's secretary, let alone his wife. She'd be lucky if she stayed out of jail.

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But to make a run for it now—even if she had any place to run to—would be to admit her guilt. And Tenny might not be absolutely convinced, after all. So he wasn't laughing when Byron left him. Naturally not; Carol or no Carol, he would be seeing the end of his lovely little fling as a bigshot. Poor old Tenny. He might still call her. It was worth a gamble. Wasn't it? Was it?

Yes, no, yes, no, in the same compulsive circle that kept her fingers busy with their pleat, smooth. Oh, if only she knew what Byron had on her! If only she knew where to find him . . .

I'd kill him, she thought with cold certainty. I wouldn't care what it cost me. I'd kill him for this—and enjoy it.

No one expected Estrella's birthday reunion to be anything less than an ordeal. But in the end no one was quite brave enough—or cowardly enough, who knew?—to risk staying away. By the same token, they had all decided against sounding out the others on the question of Byron's return. There had been no inquiries, however tentative, no exchange of information. Each had hung back, waiting for someone else to take the first step—until now it was too late for anybody to budge. Byron alone could break the deadlock.

Itching with curiosity (Do the others know? How much do they know?), aching with anxiety, burning with their secret yet mutual knowledge, they sat in Estrella's living room and waited for Byron to liberate them. They waited. And waited. And waited.

His name remained unmentionable, his chair vacant. (Not literally, since it was a buffet supper; Estrella was grateful for that one small favor.) All the same, the sense of vacancy clamped down on them like a mercilessly tightening vise. The bursts of desperate chatter, even Estrella's, grew fewer and farther between. The silence itself lost its flavor of expectancy as one by one they abandoned waiting—he would not come now, he would never come—and turned into a speculation that was even more tense than the waiting.

There was a constant, furtive exchange of glances among them, each pair of eyes seeking to catch another pair unawares, instantly shifting to avoid being caught. The very air seemed to thrum with the question that obsessed them all: Why isn't he here? And the answer: Because someone, someone else . . .

Not I, thought Estrella. *I only wished, and only for that one moment, and I didn't mean it then. Not really. Why, he's my favorite son! Certainly not I. But then who? I never did trust Mary Ethel—you mark my*

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words, I said, but he wouldn't listen.

And Carol's another. She's got her hooks into Tenny now, but it used to be Byron—yes, she's capable of anything. Even Tenny—the temper tantrums he used to have as a child. He's always been jealous—

What am I thinking? What am I going to do about Dr. Mehallah?

Not I, thought Tenny, *my conscience is perfectly clear. Which is more than can be said for some other people. Not mentioning any names. I knew she wouldn't show up at the office today—that's why I stayed home myself. And I had no intention whatever of escorting her here tonight. She could have saved her ridiculous story about, don't bother, she'd be in the neighborhood anyway, et cetera. I can make excuses too. I'll make one tonight when we both leave. If we ever do. I wish I could believe it was the fund juggling they quarreled about. Maybe he blamed her, threatened her. No, of course not. I know what it was, all right. He told her it was Mary Ethel he wanted, not her. That's why she did it, the only reason.*

Oh, Carol, Carol, you said you loved me!..

Not I, thought Carol, *I didn't even see him. That's all that stopped me. Okay. But I didn't see him. No skin off my nose who did. It gives me the creeps, though, not to know for sure.*

The old lady's not the sweet little featherbrain she's cracked up to be. A whim of iron, if I ever saw one.

Mary Ethel would get my vote except I know good and well he'd head straight for her, the rat, the minute he hit town. Before he called me, that's for sure. So she couldn't have—wait a minute, they could have made a date for later.

Same thing goes for Tenny, I suppose. For all I know, that's why he stayed away from the office today. He hated Byron enough. And now he hates me. I get the message, I know when I'm getting the old heave-ho. Well, I can take it. Damn, just when I thought I had it made.

Not I, thought Mary Ethel, *I only tried and failed. As at least one of them must know, because one of them must have tried and succeeded. Don't tell me he wouldn't be here otherwise—he'd have been in his glory, watching everybody wriggle—and don't tell me they didn't have as much reason as I to want him dead. So who are they to be sneaking looks at me?*

It could just as easily have been one of them. Any of them. Or—or all of them. Is that it? They've always hated me—they'd dearly love to hang it on me if they could. No one of them alone would have the nerve, but

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all of them together—a solid block of three against one, all telling the same story and sticking to it, backing each other up, planting evidence against me—

He must have told them I tried. That would give them the idea, the ready-made frame. And I've been away from my apartment since noon. Plenty of time and opportunity. They're waiting now for me to go back there and find—whatever it is.

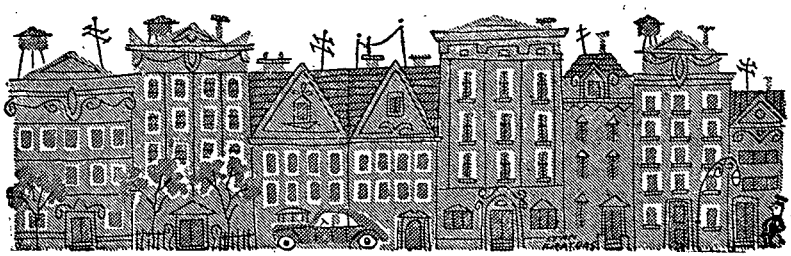
I won't go back. I can't. But if I don't go back it will look even worse. No way out? There has to be, because I'm not guilty! I failed, I failed! I only tried and failed!

Once across the bridge and on the thruway, the big bus settled down to a steady, purposeful purr. Very soothing. Byron stretched his legs and leaned back comfortably, at peace with the world—the ex-Byron Hawley, traveling light and liking it.

He had fully intended to show up at his mother's party, had in fact been on his way to it when all at once there was the bus station, the bus waiting for him, the space available, the irresistible urge to do everybody a favor and get rid of the old Byron Hawley once and for all.

No doubt about its being a favor to all of them—he had found that out for sure. There hadn't been time for a telephone call before the bus left. And maybe that too was just as well, though of course some day he would probably, some day he might . . .

He yawned hugely. Then again he might not. The bus purred, lulling him to sleep.



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